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February 2025 Edition

DAYTONA 500



Cousins Moved To Backup



4-Star QB To Camden



Braves Sign Profar

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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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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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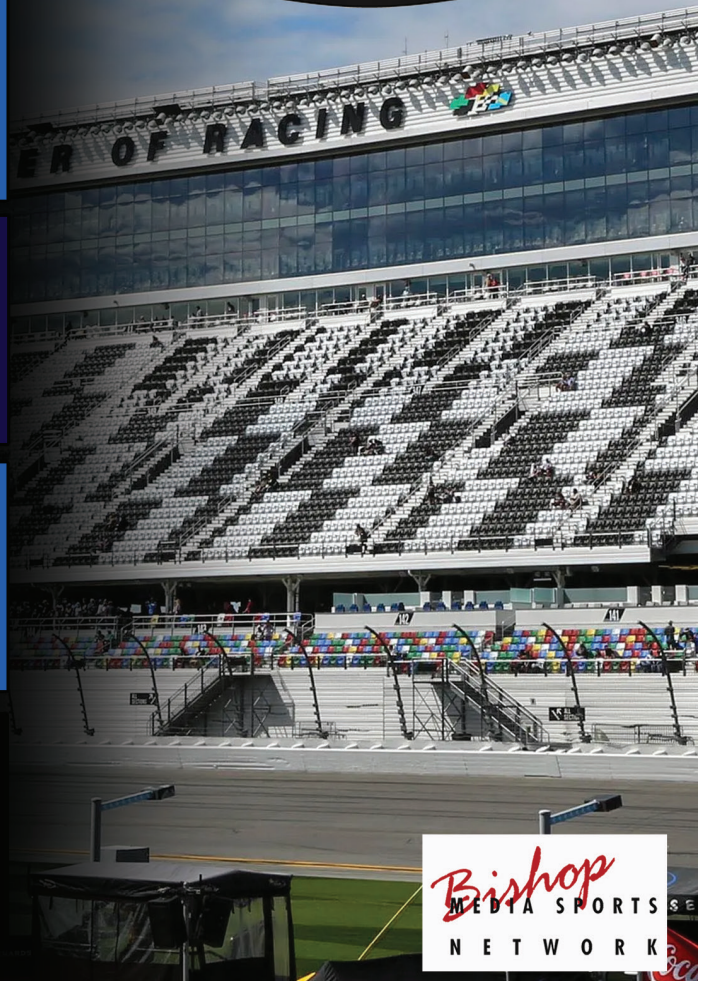
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GENTLEMEN, START YOUR ENGINES

Daytona 500 By Robert Craft



The Super Bowl is the pinnacle of a long successful season for NFL teams. In NASCAR, they have the Daytona 500. It's the first race of the season and also the most prestigious event on the circuit.

The stars of the Cup Series are all set to be in Daytona on February 16 to run in the crown jewel of stock car to open the regular season, including defending Cup champion Joey Logano.

Several stars will be running to earn their first Daytona 500 victory, including Chase Elliott, Kyle Busch and Kyle Larson.

Dale Earnhardt Jr., JR Motorsports, will attempt to make its' Cup Series debut in next month's season-opening Daytona 500, the team announced Wednesday.

JRM is partnering with country singer and songwriter Chris Stapleton to enter a car for driver Justin Allgaier, with Stapleton's Traveller Whiskey brand sponsoring the effort.

Earnhardt, a two-time Daytona 500 winner (2004, 2014), has publicly spoken many times about how he'd like to see JRM expand into Cup on a full-time basis, though he's emphasized that any move would have to make financial sense for the company.

Thus far, such a move has proven cost-prohibitive at a time when charters — the NASCAR equivalent of a franchise in other sports — are valued at \$20 million plus.



Owning one of 36 charters guarantees a team certain revenue streams not otherwise available, making operating as a full-time "open" not cost-effective over the long term.

Helio Castroneves, four-time Indianapolis 500 winner and one of the more popular drivers of his generation, will make his NASCAR debut in next month's Cup Series season-opening Daytona 500, Trackhouse Racing announced Monday. Castroneves will drive a car fielded by Trackhouse Racing.

The majority of Castroneves' 20-year plus career has been spent in IndyCar, winning 31 races and being runner-up to the championship four times. His most notable accomplishment is being part of an exclusive group who've won the Indianapolis 500 a record four times, with only A.J. Foyt, Rick Mears and Al Unser Sr. as the other members.

Should Castroneves win the Daytona 500, he would join Foyt and Mario Andretti as the only drivers to win both the Daytona 500 and Indianapolis 500.

When two-time Formula One world champion Fernando Alonso failed to qualify for the 2019 Indianapolis 500, it sent a message to the world: This IndyCar stuff isn't easy.

To just award a 41st starting spot in a field that has been capped at 40 cars for the last decade — just because the driver is famous to international fans — doesn't align with the true spirit of competition.

Oh, and former NASCAR champions Jimmie Johnson and Martin Truex Jr.? They'll show up at Daytona next month required to qualify into the 500 with no guarantee they'll make the field, just like any other driver.



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BIG



BIG

BIG 10 IS BIG DOG

The Big 10 Is The New King By Michael Spiers

BIG

For years, the SEC was the king of college football.

Teams like Alabama, Georgia, LSU, Florida, and Auburn dominated the sport, racking up 13 national championships between 2006 and 2022.

The SEC was the standard everyone else chased. But the past two seasons have certainly shaken things up. Michigan claimed the title at the end of the 2023 season, and Ohio State

in college football, especially with name, image, and likeness (NIL).

Schools like Ohio State, Michigan, and Oregon are spending big money to keep their rosters stacked. Ohio State reportedly spent over \$20 million on its 2024 squad, while Michigan has been splurging to reload after its 2023 title run. With massive alumni bases pouring money into these programs, the Big Ten is thriving in this new era.

Take Michigan's 2023 title, for example. They didn't rely on having a roster full of five-star recruits. Instead, they focused on scouting and developing NFL-level talent, with 13 players from that team drafted last year.

On the flip side, Ohio State has leaned heavily on NIL to keep stars

recruiting classes.

The SEC's depth and talent pool ensure it'll always be a contender, even if the past two seasons haven't gone their way.

What's changed is how teams build and manage their rosters. The NIL era and transfer portal have made things more competitive, and the SEC's old formula of stockpiling talent is harder to pull off. Programs like Alabama and Georgia are adjusting, but Big Ten schools have been quicker to adapt. That's why the Big Ten is on top right now

But don't count the SEC out. They're still loaded with talent, and schools like Alabama and Georgia aren't going to sit back quietly.



followed up this year with a 34-23 win over Notre Dame.

It has been decades since there was a two year stretch without an SEC team appearing in the championship game.

So, is the Big Ten the new top dog in college football? I know some college football people that are starting to look at it that way.

Big Ten teams didn't just win the last two titles—they also went 5-1 against the SEC in 2024, showing they've got the upper hand right now, with a heavy emphasis on right now.

A big part of this success is how the Big Ten has embraced the changes

like Emeka Egbuka and J.T. Tuimoloau around and bring in game-changing transfers. These strategies are helping the Big Ten keep up with—if not outpace—the SEC.

Still, the SEC isn't going anywhere. The South is a recruiting goldmine, especially when it comes to big, athletic linemen, and that's not changing.

Alabama, Georgia, and other SEC teams continue to crush it in recruiting rankings. In 2024, six of the top nine teams in the 247Sports Talent Composite were from the SEC, and the conference landed eight of the top 15

While the Big Ten basks in back-to-back championships and a strong 2024 showing, the SEC is too competitive to stay down for long.

With their recruiting edge and relentless drive to win, it's only a matter of time before they're back in the title conversation.

For now, the Big Ten has the bragging rights. But college football is unpredictable, and with the SEC and Big Ten both packed with powerhouse programs, the battle for dominance is far from over. This rivalry is setting the stage for an exciting new chapter in the sport.



Weight Training? Lift Smarter, Not Harder



Gregory R. Kelley, MD

A board-certified physiatrist, Dr. Kelley specializes in physiatry, physical medicine and rehabilitation.

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

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



Whatever sport you play, weightlifting will work wonders for your strength, muscle mass and bone density – as long as you lift the right way. “It’s important to pace yourself and use proper form when lifting; you will be more effective with your time and reduce your chance of injury. While it can be tempting to rush through a repetitive workout, it pays off to stay focused,” says Gregory Kelley, MD, a board-certified interventional physiatrist at Summit Sports Medicine & Orthopaedic Surgery. Physiatrists are also known as Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R) physicians.

New to weight training? Consider working with an athletic trainer or physical therapist. “They will help you establish good habits and correct form. You will also learn to avoid overexerting yourself which can make you vulnerable to injury,” Dr. Kelley says. Even individuals who lift regularly can benefit from a refresher session. “It is always smart to have a professional observe your technique and make corrections as needed. That allows you to train safely at every stage of your life.”

Speaking of good technique, here are Dr. Kelley’s recommendations for working smarter, not harder in the gym.

1. **Lift the right amount of weight.** Depending on your age and fitness level, you should be able to do 10 to 15 repetitions. “For many people, a single set of 15 repetitions is as effective as three sets. If your form gets sloppy, switch to lighter weights or cut back on repetitions.” If you’re doing more than one set, rest for 60 seconds in between.
2. **Focus on form.** Move slowly and deliberately through your full range of motion. Don’t use momentum or swing the weights. Your results will improve, and you will avoid injury.
3. **Be balanced.** Work all of your major muscle groups and opposing muscles.
4. **Don’t forget to breathe!** “Remind yourself to breathe out when you lift and breathe in as you lower the weight.”
5. **Remember to rest.** Alternate strength training days with cardiovascular and flexibility workouts.

It’s equally important to avoid bad habits. “Always warm up for 10 or more minutes before lifting – stretch, walk or do another type of aerobic exercise. Cold, tight muscles are prone to injury,” adds Dr. Kelley. Wear comfortable clothing that allows you to move freely, close-toed athletic shoes with good support and weightlifting gloves to cushion and stabilize your grip.

With strength training, Dr. Kelley says “Slow and steady wins the race. Don’t be tempted to lift more weight than you can safely handle and don’t lift more than three days per week.” Lastly, he says that “no pain, no gain” has no place in weightlifting. “Listen to your body. It’s okay for your muscles to feel fatigued, sore or stiff when you first start. You can relieve this by warming up before lifting and stretching afterwards. If you feel pain when lifting, taper off to a lighter weight or take a rest day.”



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PROFAR POTENTIAL

Braves Sign Jurickson Profar By Colin Lacy



Finally...Finally we have a newsworthy headline coming out of Truist Park. The Atlanta Braves and Jurickson Profar have agreed to a three-year deal to bring the 2024 All-Star to Braves Country.

After an offseason that seemingly only had departures from “the A,” the Braves fill a void in the outfield that virtually everyone around the Braves organization had in the top 2 of needs going into the 2025 season.

Profar had by far his best season of his 11-year MLB Career with the Padres in 2024 and knocked out many career firsts. The Curacao native notched his first career All-Star Game appearance, first career Silver Slugger and finished in the top 15 in the voting for the NL MVP Award.

Career bests were aplenty in 2024 for Profar. The 31-year-old knocked an eleven year best .280 average while driving home a career high 85 RBIs and a career most 24 homeruns.

While last season for Profar was spectacular, was it an anomaly? Profar is a career .245 hitter with only three 20-homer seasons including 2024 (the others coming in back-to-

back years in 2018 & 2019). Is Profar able to replicate the successes of 2024 while donning the Braves uniform in 2025? Only time will tell.

Should this alleviate the frustrations of Braves fans that were caused by the quiet off-season? To me, that answer is... partially.

This could be a good piece for Atlanta. Besides coming off the career year for Profar, he is also a versatile veteran that has appeared at seven different positions in his big-league career (has only not appeared as a pitcher and catcher).

While Profar has settled into a leftfielder (148 of the 158 appearances coming in LF), he has seen significant time in a year at shortstop, second base, and first base. This is unquestioned an attempt to fill the outfield void, but I’m just playing devil’s advocate that there are other plus sides to this move that may not shine through until a worst-case scenario comes to fruition.

The flip side of the stance that this move partially curbs the frustration of Braves Country is that this move can’t be THE move of the offseason.

Earlier it was mentioned that filling the void in the outfield was probably in the top two needs moving forward for the Braves, the other would-be starting pitching.

The Braves have already seen Max Fried sign with the Yankees and Charlie Morton sign with the Orioles pairing that with the fact that Spencer

Strider won’t be fully healthy when the team breaks camp to begin the 2025 campaign, it means the Braves have to bring in a solid at worst starter.

Before the Profar signing, Braves beat writer Mark Bowman reported that sources inside the Braves organization had said the club would be sitting right around the \$33 million range for added salary going into 2025. Now that Profar is earning \$12 million of his 3-year \$42 million deal in 2025, assuming that number stays similar, it gives the Braves about \$20 million to work with to find rotation help.

Atlanta had talks with Nathan Eovaldi for figures around that \$20 million mark before Eovaldi signed a three-year deal with the Rangers worth a total of \$75 million.

So, who is still on the market for starting pitching? There have been a couple free-of free-agents that have been picked around and still available in guys like Jack Flaherty, but the free-agent market is starting to become bare. I believe a trade is the more likely target for General Manager Alex Anthopolous.

All of that said, I’m not saying that Jurickson Profar is a wasted move. It’s a good piece added to the Braves lineup and at least partially answers the outfield question, but it can’t be the biggest move of the offseason if the Braves want to be reloaded and ready to roll into 2025.



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BYE BYE BECK

Carson Beck Commits to Miami By Robert Craft



Carson Beck committed to Miami on Friday. The 6-foot-4, 220-pound QB is headed to Coral Gables for his final year of eligibility.

Beck started 13 games for Georgia in 2024. He completed 290 passes on 448 attempts — a 64.7 completion percentage — for 3,485 yards with 28 touchdowns and 12 interceptions. He threw for 7,912 yards with 58 touchdowns and 20 interceptions during his time as a Bulldog.

Beck entered the 2024 season as a preseason Heisman Trophy favorite, but his play early in the year did not

and threw 3 picks in a 30-15 victory for the Bulldogs.

Beck explained prior to the SEC title game that the first Texas game was an eye opener in terms of what he should and should not do with the football.

"You go back and you watch that game, and there's just some situations where maybe I was trying to force the ball when it didn't need to and maybe trying to make plays when they weren't there," Beck said.

"I think that's one thing that I've really improved on as we've gotten into this kind of later half of the season, is not trying to do too much and just playing within myself and playing within the offense. Knowing when to try to make a play and knowing when to just chalk it up and move on to the next one. There's three downs to get a first down for a reason. You don't have to try to get it all in one play, and I think I've done a better job at that in this second half of the season."

momentarily and was tended to by UGA trainers before he stood up by himself and headed to the locker room.

He did not throw another pass after sustaining the injury in the conference title game, but he was not done for the day. He checked back in for what was ultimately the game's final play after Gunner Stockton had to leave for one play due to his helmet coming off.

Beck underwent elbow surgery on Dec. 23, which means he will not resume throwing until the spring. He was present for Georgia's 23-10 loss to Notre Dame in the Sugar Bowl on Jan. 2.

Beck initially declared for the NFL Draft on Dec. 28. He changed his course of action on Jan. 9 and instead entered the transfer portal.

Beck joins a Hurricanes team hungry to make the College Football Playoff under alum Mari Cristobal. The Hurricanes went 10-2 in the 2024 regular



meet the lofty goal. Beck threw 7 total touchdowns in Georgia's first two games before throwing for a measly 160 yards and no touchdowns in a 13-12 thriller at Kentucky.

The situation got worse at Alabama, where Beck threw 3 interceptions and fumbled in a 41-34 loss for the Bulldogs.

Beck threw 2 touchdowns against Auburn before throwing 3 touchdowns and 2 interceptions against Mississippi State.

His turnover issues came into focus again on Oct. 19 against Texas, when he did not throw for a single touchdown

Beck threw 3 interceptions two weeks later against Florida and from there his turnover issues subsided.

He threw 1 interception the following week at Ole Miss and zero in his final four games of the year, all of which were Georgia victories.

Beck's season came to a close following a big hit during the SEC championship game back on Dec. 7. Beck was injured on the final play of the first half of the SEC title game against Texas.

Beck was hit by Trey Moore on a last-second Hail Mary attempt, which led to Beck falling awkwardly on his left arm. Beck stayed down on the turf

season, which left them at No. 13 in the final CFP ranking.

Beck replaces Cam Ward, who, like Beck, had declared for the draft before deciding to enter the portal and land at Miami.

Ward is considered by many to be the eventual top pick in the 2025 NFL Draft after throwing for 4,313 yards with 39 touchdowns and 7 interceptions.

The rumor is Miami is forking out 4 million compared to his current deal with Georgia at 2.5 million.

Beck can now afford 2 Lamborghinis!

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STRONG ARMING

SEC Can't Keep Up By Colin Lacy



Just a month ago we were talking about if it should be four or five teams from the Southeastern Conference in the first edition of the 12-team College Football Playoff.

This was also when the SEC was flocking to Atlanta for the SEC Championship game that has turned into a celebration of SEC Football in the heart of the peach state at Mercedes Benz Stadium.

Now the college football world returns to the Benz, but one thing is missing...the SEC.

Monday night will be the culmination of the 2024 college football season with the College Football Playoff National Championship Game between Ohio State and Notre Dame.

While the SEC did makeup a quarter of the inaugural twelve team field with Georgia (#2 seed), Texas (#5 seed), and Tennessee (#9 seed), the premier conference in college football combined for 2 wins in the bracket (both coming from Texas).

So, what have the two teams that will battle for the top spot in college football done to overpower the SEC?

Now most may say that that is an outlandish statement, but when you look at the bracket, Notre Dame and Ohio State combined to eliminate every SEC team in this field.

There is something about both of these two teams that stands out that was a glaring issue in the Southeastern Conference all season long. High-level quarterback play.

Both the Buckeyes and Irish have used the transfer portal in a big way, but especially at the signal-caller position.

After Sam Hartman made his way as an un-drafted free agent with the Commanders, Notre Dame went out and got a graduate transfer that had burst on the scene the last few years while piloting the Duke Blue Devils in Riley Leonard.

The Fairhope, Alabama native had last season cut short because of injury with the Blue Devils (coincidentally he was injured against Notre Dame) and has grown into Irish OC Mike Denbrock's offense as the season has gone.

The Irish began the year with an impressive 23-13 victory in College Station against Texas A&M (again as coincidence would have it, against Leonard's former Blue Devil Head Coach Mike Elko).

The following week would prove to be the low point in the season by falling to Northern Illinois 16-14. Since then, Leonard and the Irish have rattled off 13 straight wins including CFP wins over Georgia and Penn State. Leonard has thrown for over 2,600 yards and 19 passing touchdowns and adding 16 more scores on the ground.

On the flipside of the card, Ohio State has been steady (aside from the rivalry loss to Michigan at the end of November) with a 13-2 record this year behind another graduate transfer quarterback.

Much like Notre Dame, the Buckeyes have found success with Will Howard after transferring from Kansas State. Howard isn't as mobile as Leonard but has dazzled the Big 10 Conference to the tune of just shy of 3,800 yards through the air and 33 touchdowns to only 10 interceptions.

Through the season names of Cam Ward, Jaxson Dart, and Carson Beck have dominated the "best quarterback in college football" conversation, but you'd be hard pressed to find a quarterback that

has played better than either one of these field generals in Leonard and Howard, and I truly believe that is the reason the SEC isn't represented in the biggest game on the college football schedule (and many are disappointed in the SEC showing in the CFP).

Quarterback play hasn't been at the level that it has in the past. Many thought that Carson Beck for the Georgia Bulldogs was going to be a first-round pick entering the season.

As the weeks would play out, he would be good at times and show flashes, but never took the game to the next level which culminates in his transfer to Miami after he had declared for the NFL draft for a week.

Don't get me wrong, there were good quarterbacks in the league. Jaxson Dart with Ole Miss had a good season in Oxford, Brady Cook at Missouri may have proven to be one of the most important players in the SEC to their team in the Mizzou performances when he was injured, and Nico Iamaleava (Tennessee) Jalen Milroe (Alabama) and Quinn Ewers (Texas) were all good, but nobody had the breakout season that "wow'd" everyone.

Strangely the most impressive quarterback performance of the season may have come from Gainesville and DJ Lagway coming in as a true freshman, and after an injury to incumbent starter Graham Mertz, Lagway took the reins.

Granted there were some growing pains with Lagway, but by the end of the season, may have been the most impressive quarterback in the SEC.

All of that said, as strange as it feels to not have a SEC team playing for a championship on Monday IN ATLANTA, the finale of the CFP will showcase two pretty impressive offensive commanders for the Irish and Buckeyes.



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WILDCATS

10



CATS QB ONES

Camden Set At QB By Jason Bishop



Let me start by saying there is no quarterback controversy. I repeat there is no QB controversy whatsoever.

Now that we have addressed that what we can say is that the Camden County Wildcats will have great QB play for at least the next three years.

Currently, the Wildcats will have Parks Riendeau returning for his senior season as the signal caller for Camden.

The Cats have also had a talented young QB transfer in.

as a freshman for Winter Park. He went 18-27 for 145 yards with no touchdowns or interceptions. He also rushed seven times for 68 yards and a touchdown on the ground.

Jackson should thrive when it is his turn in Coach Roland's Spread offense as Riendeau did as a junior.

Riendeau threw for over 1800 yards and 21 touchdowns. He only threw 5 interceptions all season. At one point, Riendeau led all of 6A in passing yards.

He also led Camden to the GHSA 7A Final Four in 2023 under then Head Coach, Jeff Herron running the Wing-T offense.

Riendeau has been on the varsity roster since he was a freshman.

The Camden County Coaching Staff has told SSE the plan is to have Riendeau lead the



William Jackson is now on campus in Kingsland, GA. Jackson is a four-star recruit that stands at 6'4 196 pounds has a cannon for an arm, and is a killer in the rushing game.

Jackson transferred into Camden County High School from Winter Park High School in the Orlando area at the beginning of this current Spring Semester.

The great thing for Camden fans is Jackson is only a sophomore. Jackson has offers from Virginia Tech, South Carolina, Arkansas and Marshall to name a few. He has also taken visits to Ohio State, Florida, USF, Auburn, Miami and Florida State. The offer list will only grow over the next few years.

Jackson played in four games

Wildcats in 2025 and then have Jackson take over for 2026 and 2027.

Region 1-6A is the region Camden plays in and it is the best region in the state top to bottom. Region 1-6A consists of Camden, Colquitt, Lowndes, Valdosta, Richmond Hill and Tift County.

The future is bright in Kingsland, GA for the Camden County Wildcats.

It's a good piece added to the Braves lineup and at least partially answers the outfield question, but it can't be the biggest move of the offseason if the Braves want to be reloaded and ready to roll into 2025.

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NEW SECRET TO WINNING

College Football Has Changed By Robert Craft



It's been two beautiful seasons for SEC haters tired of the league's dominance.

An SEC team hoisted the national title trophy in 13 of 17 seasons between 2006-2022.

Five different programs accounted for those titles, spreading the wealth around the conference: cementing its status as king of the sport.

Last season, the SEC was forced to endure the indignity of watching a Big Ten team (Michigan) beat a soon-to-be Big Ten team (Washington) for the national title. It was only the second time since Texas-USC in 2005 that the SEC sat on the sidelines during the national championship.

Now, as the College Football Playoff semifinals are set to begin, the SEC might find the same seat on the sidelines.

Notre Dame and Penn State faced off Thursday in Miami. A day later, Texas and a red-hot Ohio State in the Cotton Bowl.

The Longhorns, the first-year wearers of the SEC patch, the team who's not part of the decades-long legacy, are the SEC's last hope.

The South's place in the sport may have slipped the past two seasons, but the league's firm foundation is suited to handle the sport's shifting sands better than any other conference. It will be back.

College football — especially roster construction and management — is changing. Stockpiling the quality of depth of talent that helped fuel Georgia's back-to-back titles in 2021 and 2022 and Nick Saban's decade of dominance at Alabama has never been harder to attain.

In the transfer portal era and with the advent of name, image and likeness (NIL), some argue building programs of that caliber is impossible.

Here's the SEC's cringeworthy slogan — "It just means more" — which works for most recruits because it's true.

Michigan, Ohio State and Notre Dame have the three biggest fan bases in the sport, but none have access to highly talented high schools that SEC programs have in their backyards.

Talent wins out, especially in recruiting. The transfer portal equalizes the importance between acquiring talented athletes and keeping them at the program all four years.

Consider Michigan's path to last season's national title: It had just two five-star prospects on its roster. Michigan joined Auburn (2010) and Clemson (2016 and 2018) as the fourth national champion that didn't sign a top five recruiting class in the previous four years.

It had the nation's 14th-most talented roster, according to 247Sports' Talent Composite, which is weighted toward recruiting rankings.

What Michigan did have was NFL talent, proving that their ranking was far from gospel.

Michigan's roster featured 13 picks in last year's draft — nine of whom went in the first five rounds. The Wolverines have four more major contributors on last year's team who are top 50 prospects in this year's draft, according to draft experts.

Michigan's title was a monument to Jim Harbaugh's ability to scout and develop. He built a title-worthy roster in a manner seldom seen in modern college football.

Harbaugh was one of the best coaches in the sport, and this feat may never be duplicated. It's certainly not a sustainable, long-term plan to churn out championships.

But consider this season's Ohio State team, now the betting favorite to

win the title in Atlanta later this month. The Buckeyes famously spent \$20 million assembling this roster, and although acquisitions like running back Quinshon Judkins from Ole Miss and safety Caleb Downs from Alabama made the biggest offseason headlines, the bulk of that money went to making sure players such as WR Emeka Egbuka, DE Jack Sawyer, JT Tuimoloau, DT Tyleik Williams and running back TreVeyon Henderson came back to chase a title rather than beginning their NFL careers.

Now, these investments are well-positioned to pay off after an unthinkable loss to Michigan in the regular-season finale.

That \$20 million is believed to be at or near the top of the market for a roster in the sport this season, and generally, the biggest spenders in the NIL era have been the teams that haven't won big in recent years before money became the currency of roster building in college football.

Oregon, Tennessee, Texas A&M, Texas, Ole Miss and Florida State were among the most aggressive programs in the earliest days of NIL.

The sport is changing. The blueprint for building perennial championship contenders is evolving by the year, adapters will rise.

Georgia, Alabama, Florida, LSU, and others in the SEC are always going to be committed to doing whatever it takes to build a champion — at any cost.

In the interim, that almost certainly means they will funnel more money to collectives and NIL. This will go on top of the upcoming money for revenue sharing, schools will start paying players as a result of the House v. NCAA settlement.

As the sport has changed, programs such as Ohio State and Oregon have done the best job adjusting to those changes, while programs like Alabama and Georgia have tried to adapt their old model for success into the new world of college football.

The safe bet is it won't stay that way for long. Talent wins out.





\$180 MILLION BACKUP

Cousins Moved To Backup By Colin Lacy



With the NFL Wild Card round starting for the 2024 postseason this weekend, one team that had a shot to play on into postseason, but came up short to end the regular season made some news as Atlanta Falcons GM Terry Fontenot met with the media Thursday afternoon.

Fontenot met with the media and when asked about the plan for Kirk Cousins, the Falcons GM said the Atlanta is “comfortable” with having the \$180 million QB serve as the back-up moving forward.

“We are very comfortable moving forward with (Cousins) as backup,” Fontenot said Thursday.

“Kirk is a great man, and he's been great support for Mike. We are very comfortable moving forward with him as the backup.”

After turnover issues, the Falcons made the decision to bench Cousins officially going into week 16 against the Giants and turned to Michael Penix Jr. to lead the Atlanta offense for the final three regular season game.

Coming into the season, after Atlanta signed Kirk Cousin for \$180 million to pilot the Falcons just weeks

before drafting Penix in the first round after his magical run with University of Washington.

The sequence of moves left a lot of Falcons fans scratching their heads. While either one set alone would be great for a Falcons team who has been thirsting for a productive quarterback ever since the front office “let” Matt Ryan go to the Colts...Still not over that. The rub came with the question of “why both?”

The Falcons plan for this marriage was, at least publicly, was for Cousins to navigate the Falcons for two seasons while mentoring Michael Penix Jr. When the turnover woes came into play, the timeline was expedited by well over a year.

Terry Fontenot also told the media that the Falcons signed Cousins expecting to see a “high-level quarterback play for two years.” The Atlanta GM would go on to say, “the plan was for Kirk to play longer and for Mike to sit longer.”

Now the question comes into play of while the Falcons are “comfortable” with Cousins continuing the mentorship part of the plan and serving as the backup quarterback, is Cousins comfortable with the new plan?

Cousins showed flashes of still being a really good quarterback in the NFL, thinking back to his record setting 509 yards passing in an overtime win against Tampa Bay.

Folks also thought this was a

match made in heaven with back-to-back wins against the Cowboys and Buccaneers for a second time, but that was the pinnacle of the season for Cousins.

After that stretch, the final five starts for the former Viking turned into throwing one touchdown and nine interceptions which would tie the NFL lead for the season with sixteen picks.

Especially after the Netflix Documentary “Quarterback” a few years ago, Cousins has been a fan favorite for his personality and leadership qualities everywhere he's been, especially in his time with Minnesota, and that's no different in Atlanta.

While a well-established NFL quarterback very easily could have turned the relationship sour after being benched in year one, Fontenot alluded to that being far from this situation, “Kirk is a great man, and he's been great support for Mike. We are very comfortable moving forward with him as the backup.”

This is one, I'm torn. From the Falcons perspective, it would be awesome for Cousins to be essentially a second QB coach for Atlanta and mentor Michael Penix Jr. as he begins what the Birds believe is a long and successful career.

On the flip side, I also think Cousins has a lot to give to a team and could be a crucial factor going forward.



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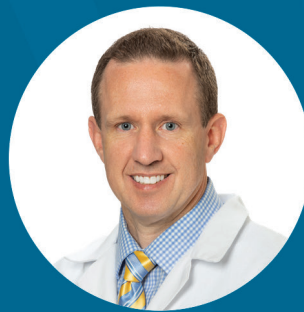
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