

THE SOUTHERN SPORTS EDITION

October 2026 Edition

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BRAVES



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GET TO KNOW THE WRITERS

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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 all across Southeast Georgia and growing everyday.

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OCTOBER 2026 EDITION

THE *SOUTHERN SPORTS* EDITION

HOW THE EAST WAS WON

THE BRAVES JOURNEY

PAGE 4

by Colin Lacy

PROTECT COLLEGE SPORTS

CONTROL THIS MADNESS

PAGE 6

by Michael Spiers

STAYING IN STATE

GEORGIA PLAYER COMMITMENTS

PAGE 10

by Joseph Stuckey

RED TERRORS SEASON

GLYNN 2026 MID-SEASON

PAGE 14

by Garrison Ryfun

TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN

THE TOP TEAMS IN 7A

PAGE 18

by Kenneth Harrison

THE MAGIC TICKET

PLAYOFF CHANGE OPENS DOORS

PAGE 22

by Capers Childs

OCTOBER IN REGION 1

WHY OCTOBER MATTERS

PAGE 26

by Ron Reagin

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Elias Grant, Richmond Hill WR/DB

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HOW THE EAST WAS WON

The Braves Journey By Colin Lacy



Has the Atlanta Braves season in 2026 been flawless? No. That being said however, most teams in baseball would trade their seasons with the Braves in a heartbeat.

When you factor in all of the adversity that seemed to be never ending for the franchise, the season has been almost unbelievable.

Think back to the middle of February. Spring training is supposed to be the time of unrealistic optimism, but for Atlanta, it was a time of blow after blow.

Just when camp was beginning, the Braves learned that Jurickson Profar was popped for the second time for the league's performance enhancing drugs policy and would miss the entire season.

Just days later, Atlanta learned that pitchers Joe Jimenez, Spencer Schwellenbach, Spence Strider all were hit with the injury bug.

Throughout the season there has been numerous impact injuries with AJ Smith-Shawver, Bryce Elder, Strider... again, Reynaldo Lopez just to name a few.

Through all of the injury bugs (almost felt like an infestation), the

Braves sat atop the NL East virtually from opening day. The lead ballooned to as many as 10 ½ games in May but had the division at an arm's length the entire back half of the regular season and wrapped up their seventh NL East title in the last nine years with a September 20th win over the Astros in Houston.

How did the Braves overcome everything? The old adage of "everyone has to deal with injuries at some point" is true, but the Braves felt like it was a decade worth in one season.

To me, it starts at the top. First year manager Walt Weiss should be heavily in the conversation for Manager of the Year award and was the perfect person in order to keep this team on the same page.

Weiss has shown he has been the perfect combination of old school baseball mind, and the willingness to embrace the new school additions to the game.

While the household names of Matt Olson, Drake Baldwin, and Ronald Acuna Jr (when he's been healthy), have done their parts to get the Braves to the promise land of the postseason, it's been the unsung heroes for the Braves that have made this season possible.

Names like Mauricio Dubon who have done a little bit of everything for Atlanta, Mike Yastremski, Tyler Mahle and others have raised their standard to a new level in 2026 to propel Atlanta to where they wanted to be.

Nobody embodies this more

than Martin Perez. How fitting was it that Perez started the game that clinched the NL East title for the Braves.

Perez was a non-roster invitee to Spring Training then was designated for assignment by the club on April 12th.

Yet not only was it his Sunday September 20th start that secured the division title for the Braves, a Perez start really kickstarted the pitching resurgence down the back stretch.

Atlanta broke into the month of August with a spot start for Martin Perez that found out he was starting about an hour and a half before first pitch. How did it kickstart something?

Perez took a no-hitter into the 7th inning. While I understand that is just one of 162, that is what really started a stretch of impressive starting pitching for Atlanta.

The Braves were plagued by borderline horrendous starting pitching for about a month, but the strong Perez open sparked the pitching staff that was bolstered by the semi-unknown Tyler Mahle at the trade deadline.

While there have been blips on the year for the Braves, they have continued to overcome, continued to fight for the clubhouse, and will enter the postseason as the 3-seed and have to play in the opening round, but who woulda thought that the postseason was in the cards for the Braves after hit after hit (and not in the good way) they have endured thru the season.





PROTECT COLLEGE SPORTS

Control This Madness By Michael Spiers



For the past few years, I've written plenty about how college athletics has become almost unrecognizable.

The transfer portal has become free agency. NIL has evolved from athletes making money off their name, image and likeness into something that often looks a lot like recruiting payroll. Schools can now share revenue directly with athletes. And seemingly every few months another court ruling changes the rules again.

Something has to give. That is why the Protect College Sports Act (PCSA) currently moving through Congress deserves our attention.

The bipartisan legislation, sponsored by Senators Ted Cruz of Texas and Maria Cantwell of Washington, cleared an important hurdle in early September when the Senate voted 77-22 to move it forward for debate and possible final passage.

At its core, the PCSA attempts to create one national set of rules, which is something college athletics desperately needs.

Among other provisions, the legislation would establish federal standards for NIL, place limits around revenue sharing, provide the NCAA and conferences certain antitrust protections to enforce rules, establish medical and

health protections for athletes, and create protections for scholarships and roster spots in nonrevenue sports.

It also attempts to put some sanity back into the transfer portal by generally allowing athletes one unrestricted transfer without losing eligibility.

There are parts of that I really like. I've never had a problem with college athletes making money. If somebody wants to pay a Georgia quarterback to appear in a commercial or an offensive lineman to promote his business, good for them.

But what we've created isn't really NIL anymore. When players are essentially being recruited from one school to another based on who can assemble the largest financial package, let's at least admit what we're watching.

That's professional sports without contracts, salary caps or collective bargaining. College football needs rules, but the problem is deciding who gets to make them, and that's where I'm a little uncomfortable with the PCSA.

One of the biggest criticisms is that it provides antitrust protection allowing the NCAA, conferences and schools greater authority to regulate compensation and enforce restrictions.

That deserves scrutiny. For decades, college athletics fought against giving athletes a larger share of the enormous amount of money they helped generate. The courts eventually forced much of the change we're seeing today.

Now we're being asked to give some of those same institutions greater legal protection to regulate the new system.

You can understand why athletes and their advocates might be skeptical. Critics such as Senators Chris Murphy

and Cory Booker, the NAACP and athlete advocacy organizations argue the legislation places too many restrictions on players while doing comparatively little to restrain spending elsewhere in college athletics.

That's a legitimate concern, but at the same time, doing nothing isn't much of a solution either. I don't believe the current system is sustainable.

Unlimited movement, constantly changing eligibility rulings, recruiting inducements disguised as NIL agreements and different laws from state to state aren't good for the long-term health of college athletics.

And my biggest concern isn't Georgia football, Alabama football or Ohio State football.

Those programs will survive. I'm worried about wrestling, swimming, track, tennis, softball and all the other sports that don't generate millions of dollars in television revenue.

The PCSA specifically attempts to protect scholarships and roster opportunities in those sports, and that may ultimately be one of its most important provisions.

So, count me among those who believe college sports desperately needs guardrails. I just don't want those guardrails to become handcuffs for the athletes.

The goal shouldn't be returning college athletics to the old days when everyone made money except the people actually playing the games.

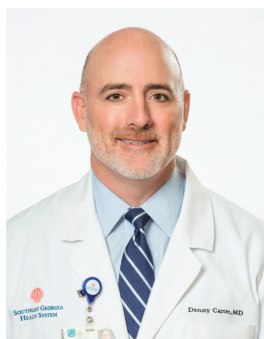
But the answer can't be pretending the current system is working perfectly either.





Hip, Hip, Hooray!

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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.



When you think about hip replacement surgery, you may picture an elderly patient walking with a cane or walker. But hip arthroplasty, also known as hip replacement, isn't limited to the very old or inactive.

Longtime athletes and active adults may also find themselves needing a new hip. According to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons, most people who undergo a total hip replacement are between ages 50 and 80.

"Older athletes aren't automatically more likely to require hip replacement surgery, but years of repetitive stress, injuries and normal age-related cartilage changes can take their toll on the hip joint," says Denny A. Carter, MD, Medical Director of Outpatient Rehabilitation Services and a board-certified orthopaedic surgeon with Summit Sports Medicine & Orthopaedic Surgery.

One of the most common reasons for hip replacement is osteoarthritis, which occurs when the protective cartilage cushioning the bones wears down over time.

Hips Don't Lie

Aches and pains may become more common with age, but certain symptoms can signal more serious hip damage. Dr. Carter recommends talking with your doctor if you experience:

- Persistent hip or groin pain that doesn't improve with rest
- Stiffness or difficulty bending or rotating your hip
- A noticeable limp or changes in how you walk
- Pain that continues despite medications, injections or physical therapy
- Pain that interferes with sleep

"The deciding factor for hip arthroplasty is often quality of life," Dr. Carter says. "If you experience persistent pain during everyday activities like walking, climbing stairs, getting out of a car or putting on your shoes, then it may be time to consider hip replacement surgery." A physical exam and imaging can help determine the extent of joint damage and whether surgery is appropriate.

What to Expect

Hip replacement does not replace the entire hip. Instead, damaged portions of the ball-and-socket joint are replaced with artificial components designed to restore smooth movement and reduce pain.

Recovery begins soon after surgery, with walking and physical therapy helping patients rebuild strength and endurance. Over the following months, patients can gradually return to everyday and recreational activities.

"You can start enjoying low-impact sports like swimming and golf between three and six months after hip arthroplasty depending on how your recovery is going," Dr. Carter explains. "More physically demanding activities will need to wait a little longer. By 12 months after surgery, many patients are able to return to a variety of recreational activities."

For active adults, hip replacement doesn't necessarily mean sitting on the sidelines. For the right patient, it can reduce pain, improve mobility and help them return to many of the activities they enjoy.

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STAYING IN STATE

Georgia Player Commitments By Joseph Stuckey



As we are less than 100 days away from Early National Signing Day on December 2nd, I thought it would be a good time to examine the recruiting rankings of the 5 FBS teams in the State of Georgia.

To start with, the Georgia Bulldogs sit at number 14 in the country with two 5-stars and eight 4-stars.

Their class is highlighted by the #1 running back in the country, Kemon Spell, and the #1 tight end, Jaxon Dollar.

They also have a local verbal commitment from Abram Eisenhower, who is a consensus 3-star offensive lineman from Lowndes County.

Next are the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets, who posted an impressive 9-4 record last season under head coach Brent Key. They currently have the number 26 overall recruiting class, which is headlined by nine 4-star recruits.

They do have local standout

offensive lineman Jordan Dillon from Effingham County verbally committed to them; he is a 3-star. Also, 3-star wide receiver Antwan Lockett from Colquitt County is verbally committed to the Yellow Jackets.

Next, I will dive into the three Group of 6 Schools in the state. It is always interesting to see which of these 3 finishes on top each year. I say this because they are all in some of the highest recruited areas in the country.

Georgia Southern is in the 912 area code, which has produced a top-3 overall recruit for the past 2 recruiting cycles. Both Kennesaw State and Georgia State are in the Metro Atlanta area, which produces a top-25 overall recruit basically every year.

First is the Georgia Southern Eagles, who have the highest average recruit rating of the three. They do have a couple of local wide receivers verbally committed to them: 3-star MJ Knight (Calvary Day) and 3-star Billy Crider (Bulloch Academy).

They also have verbal commitments from 3-star tight end Elan Jones (Ware County) and 3-star running back Josiah Gibbons (Brunswick).

Next is fellow Sun Belt school Georgia State, which has the highest-rated overall class of the three schools on both On3 and 247Sports.

Head Coach Dell McGee was able to reel in a verbal commitment from 4-star athlete Justin Murphy, who plays at nearby North Clayton High School.

They also do have a couple of local verbal commitments: 3-star wide receiver Jamarian Mingo (Valdosta) and 3-star running back Donterrius Mincey (Toombs County).

Last but not least is the defending Conference USA Champion, the Kennesaw State Owls.

Right now the Owls are basically tied with Georgia Southern in both overall recruiting class ranking and average recruit rating.

They do have a local verbal commitment from 3-star Braylon Cone (Bulloch Academy), who is the highest-rated defensive lineman in the 912 area code for the 2027 cycle.

There is not much of a surprise with where these teams currently sit in the rankings. If you look at last year's recruiting cycle rankings, it is very similar to this year's rankings.

UGA is normally near the top, and Georgia Tech is trying to crack the top 25.

For the G6 schools, they usually finish close together in the rankings, so it will be interesting to see which of the 3 ends up on top this recruiting cycle.



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RED TERRORS SEASON

Glynn 2026 Mid-Season By Garrison Ryfun



Halfway through the season, the Glynn Academy Red Terrors sit at 2-3 overall and 1-1 in region play, with the majority of their region schedule still left to go.

To this point, Glynn is averaging 33.4 points per game, which would rank as the fifth-best scoring average in school history. That offensive attack has also been pretty balanced, with four Terrors already nearing or surpassing 300 rushing yards

in the second half and carrying some of those struggles into the Camden County game.

Glynn was able to move the football in both games, but had a tough time finishing drives and turning those opportunities into points.

Since then, the offense has been much more consistent. Glynn has averaged 44 points per game over its last three games, while continuing to spread the ball around between Noonan, Robinson, Roman and Pomiechowski.

The issues for Glynn, though, have mostly come on the defensive side of the football. The Terrors are currently giving up 36.6 points per game, which, if it holds, would be the most allowed in a season in school history, surpassing the 31.2 points per game allowed by the 1977

Calvary Day's MJ Knight caught 7 passes for 135 yards and 2 TDs in the season opener, Camden County's Sean Green followed that up with 6 catches for 146 yards and 3 TDs the following week, and Bradwell's Jacobi Pasley caught 3 passes for 125 yards and 2 TDs in the region opener.

All three of those receivers had their biggest games of the season, to this point, against Glynn Academy's secondary.

That is something Glynn will have to continue to address as it gets ready for Effingham County and then Brunswick in its next two region games. Both teams are capable of airing the football out and have plenty of athletes on the outside who can create problems for Glynn's secondary.

The challenge, though, is that neither offense is one-dimensional. Both



on the season.

Starting quarterback Max Noonan has carried the ball 67 times for 329 yards and 5 TDs, while starting fullback Caiden Robinson has 60 carries for 329 yards and 6 TDs.

Ja'Kori Roman, one of Glynn's two starting slotbacks, has added 318 yards and 3 TDs on just 19 carries, while fellow slotback Ian Pomiechowski has 293 yards and 3 touchdowns on 26 carries.

The offense got off to a hot start in the first half of the season opener against Calvary Day before sputtering

team.

Glynn started the season in a base 3-3-5 defense, but quickly switched back to the more traditional 3-4 look that the Terrors have run for most of Rocky Hidalgo's tenure.

A lot of those defensive struggles have come in the secondary, where Glynn has had trouble slowing down some of the better receivers on its schedule. That has become somewhat of a trend through the first part of the season, with opposing receivers lighting up the scoreboard in their 3 losses.

Effingham and Brunswick also have great running games, which will make it difficult for Glynn to simply commit extra defenders to slowing down the passing attack.

The Terrors will have to find a way to limit explosive plays through the air while still being disciplined enough up front to stop the run.

With the region schedule beginning to take shape, those next two games should tell us a lot about where this Glynn defense stands heading into the second half of the season.

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TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN

The Top Teams In 7A By Kenneth Harrison



We're almost at the midway point for the high school football regular season. I want to take a look at some of the top teams in 7A and see how they have done thus far.

#1 Buford: The Wolves are the top team in the state and ranked #4 nationally by USA Today. They are reigning state and national champions. They have beaten some strong teams like #6 Gainesville (6A), Miami

There are only three other teams in AAAAAAA Region 2 but they are tough. They consist of Douglas County, #8 Westlake and East Coweta. Carrollton is a legit contender. They are ranked #12 nationally.

#3 Newton: This is an odd position for the Rams because they aren't a traditionally good program. They have a lot of talent on the roster this year like four-star RB Kevin Hartsfield.

They started the season with a double overtime win against Douglas County. Since then, it's been all blowouts. A couple of notable teams they beat are #8 Roswell (6A) and Warner Robins.

They'll start October playing at

in the second round of the playoffs to North Gwinnett. They start play in AAAAAAA Region 1 October 9th, which is considered the toughest region in the state.

That consists of Camden County, Richmond Hill, #7 Valdosta and #10 Colquitt County. The Vikings are looking to win their first state title since 2007.

#6 Brookwood: The Broncos have looked good so far. They were 10-3 last season, so they have started to get back to being one of the best programs in Gwinnett County. I spoke about AAAAAAA Region 7 earlier when I talked about North Gwinnett, so I won't mention that here. Their last state title was in 2010.

#7 Valdosta: The Wildcats



Central (FL) and Grayson.

They got a boost after Week 1 when five-star defensive lineman Jalen Brewster transferred in from Texas. He's also rated #4 nationally for the class of 2027.

They're about to start region play this week. AAAAAAA Region 8 is extremely weak. There's only one other team that has at least a .500 record.

#2 Carrollton: The Trojans are always competing for a state title but coming up just short. They were 14-1 last season, with the only loss coming to Buford in the state championship game. They also lost the state championship in 2024 and 2022.

#8 Westlake. They also have Grayson and Archer in their region, so we will find out if The Rams are contenders.

#4 North Gwinnett: The Bulldogs advanced to the state semifinals last season. They picked up where they left off and they have not played a close game yet. They've won every game by double digits, with the closest margin of victory being 13 points.

They've already started region play but they will play the tough teams later in the season. That includes #6 Brookwood, Peachtree Ridge and Parkview.

#5 Lowndes: The Vikings are also beating up on the competition. They finished last season 10-2, losing

have more wins than any football program in the country. They also have 24 state championships, with the most recent from 2016. They advanced to the state semifinals last season, before losing to Buford.

This team knows how to win but things will get tougher when they begin region play in mid-October.

#8 Westlake: The Lions are playing well. This school is known for producing talented players like Cam Newton, Adam "Pacman" Jones, Malik Willis, Chance Warmack and A.J. Terrell.

They get to the playoffs consistently but have never won a state championship.

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THE MAGIC TICKET

Playoff Change Opens Doors By Capers Childs



There The College Football Playoff bracket is different for the 2026 season because there is no longer a guaranteed bid for a Group of Six conference champion.

Instead, the automatic bid goes to the highest-ranked team from the American Athletic Conference, Conference USA, Mid-American Conference, Mountain West, Pac-12 or Sun Belt, regardless of whether that team wins its conference championship.

With this change, the race for the Group of Six's spot in the College Football Playoff becomes even more competitive.

With that being said, I think James Madison, Troy, Memphis and the University of South Florida have the best chance of earning that spot.

Starting with James Madison, the Dukes have gotten off to a strong start in 2026. The recent win over San Diego State is especially important because it came on the road against an FBS opponent.

JMU also forced two turnovers in the game and finished with 417 yards of total offense.

The Dukes also have several important games remaining, including games against Marshall, App State and Troy. If JMU can continue winning, especially against its stronger Sun Belt opponents, it could be a contender near the top of the Group of Six rankings.

Troy is another team that could enter the playoff conversation. The Trojans are also off to a good start. Troy's only loss came against No. 20 Missouri, 27-17.

The Trojans actually started the game strong, scoring the first 10 points and holding Missouri scoreless in the first quarter. Although the loss keeps Troy from having a perfect record, playing a ranked SEC opponent provides them with a quality opportunity to strengthen its résumé. The Trojans also have important Sun Belt games remaining, including a

game against JMU on October 29.

Memphis is another contender because of the strength of its nonconference schedule. The Tigers only have one loss and that was to Boise State.

The game against Boise State was particularly important because both teams entered the season as teams expected to compete for the Group of Six playoff spot.

Memphis still has several meaningful American Athletic Conference games remaining, including games against Tulane, Army and South Florida.

If Memphis can finish the season with a strong conference record, those games could play a major role in determining where the Tigers are ranked at the end of the season.

Finally, South Florida has also put itself in position to compete for the playoff spot. The Bulls are undefeated. One of USF's victories came over Army and that was big because Army entered that game undefeated, making it a meaningful conference victory for South Florida.

The Bulls also have several important games ahead, including UTSA, East Carolina, Memphis and Tulane.

The November 12 matchup against Memphis could be a good contest because both teams are competing for position within the American and potentially for the Group of Six automatic bid.

Overall, James Madison, Troy, Memphis and South Florida all have paths to the College Football Playoff.

The new format makes the race more complicated because winning a conference championship alone does not guarantee a playoff spot for these teams.

Instead, they need to build the strongest overall résumé possible. As the season continues, wins against quality opponents, avoiding losses and performing well against other Group of Six contenders will be important.

The team that finishes highest in the final rankings among these conferences will earn the automatic playoff bid, and that makes every remaining game important.

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OCTOBER IN REGION 1

Why October Matters By Ron Reagin



Region play has not started in Region 1-7A. That changes in October. The five-team region — Valdosta, Lowndes, Colquitt County, Camden County and Richmond Hill — has spent September on non-region slates.

The records look good, but the standings do not mean as much yet. The next five weeks will decide the region title, the first-round home game, and most of the PSR seeds that follow.

The non-region schedules for the majority of Region 1-7A has been managed well by all teams. Colquitt has suffered a couple of early losses, as well as Camden. Luckily for them, Region 1 is an equalizer if they can win in one of the toughest regions in the state.

The October-November gauntlet

Region games come in a tight cluster:

Oct. 9 — Colquitt at Richmond Hill; Lowndes vs. Camden

Oct. 16 — Valdosta at Colquitt, Richmond Hill @Camden

Oct. 23 — Camden at Valdosta; Lowndes at Richmond Hill

Oct. 30 — Lowndes vs. Valdosta (Winnersville Classic); Colquitt at Camden

Nov. 6 — Lowndes at Colquitt; Richmond Hill at Valdosta

That is 10 region games in a five week span spilling over into the first week

of November.

Every one of them counts twice: once in the region standings, and once in the PSR formula that will seed the 7A playoffs statewide.

What each team needs:

Valdosta has the best early PSR profile in the region and is projected as a high seed if it takes care of business.

The Wildcats still have to go to Moultrie, host Camden, go to Lowndes for the Winnersville Classic, and close with Richmond Hill. An unbeaten region run would lock up the title and a first-round home game.

Lowndes is 5-0 and has been dominant at home. The Vikings' non-region wins have not carried much PSR weight. Region wins will.

Hosting Camden, going to Richmond Hill, hosting Valdosta, and finishing at Colquitt is a four-game stretch that will define Adam Carter's fourth season.

Colquitt has a winning record after losses to Thomas County Central and Lee County.

Those two losses hurt the record and helped the schedule strength. The Packers still have a path to a high seed if they win their share in region play. The home date with Valdosta on Oct. 16 and the finale against Lowndes are the measuring sticks.

Camden needs region wins more than anyone. A decent start and a mid-teens PSR projection leave little margin. Games at Lowndes, at Valdosta, and at home against Colquitt will decide whether the Wildcats are a playoff team with a decent seed or a team looking in from the outside.

Richmond Hill is off to a

tremendous start and still the team the formula has treated the harshest. The early wins have not built much opponent winning percentage.

Hosting Colquitt, hosting Lowndes, and going to Valdosta in the finale is the chance to change that. Those games could flip the PSR picture fast if Richmond Hill can win continue winning in the Region.

Why October matters more this year

The region champion still gets a first-round home game. After that, PSR seeds the field 1 through 32.

A second-place team with a tougher résumé can be seeded higher than a champion from a weaker region. That is why these eight games are not just about first place. They are about who you beat and when you beat them.

Late-season upsets can wipe out a high PSR in a hurry. Region wins, in a tough region, can also climb a team several spots in a single Friday night.

The takeaway

September was about getting ready. October is about the region.

Valdosta and Lowndes enter as the favorites. Colquitt has the schedule profile to stay in the high-seed conversation. Camden and Richmond Hill have to prove it against the teams that will actually show up on the playoff résumé, and more importantly, show up in their PSR.

South Georgia fans are already looking forward to these matchups. This year they also decide the playoff seeds, and that makes October in Region 1 as important as it has been in a long time.



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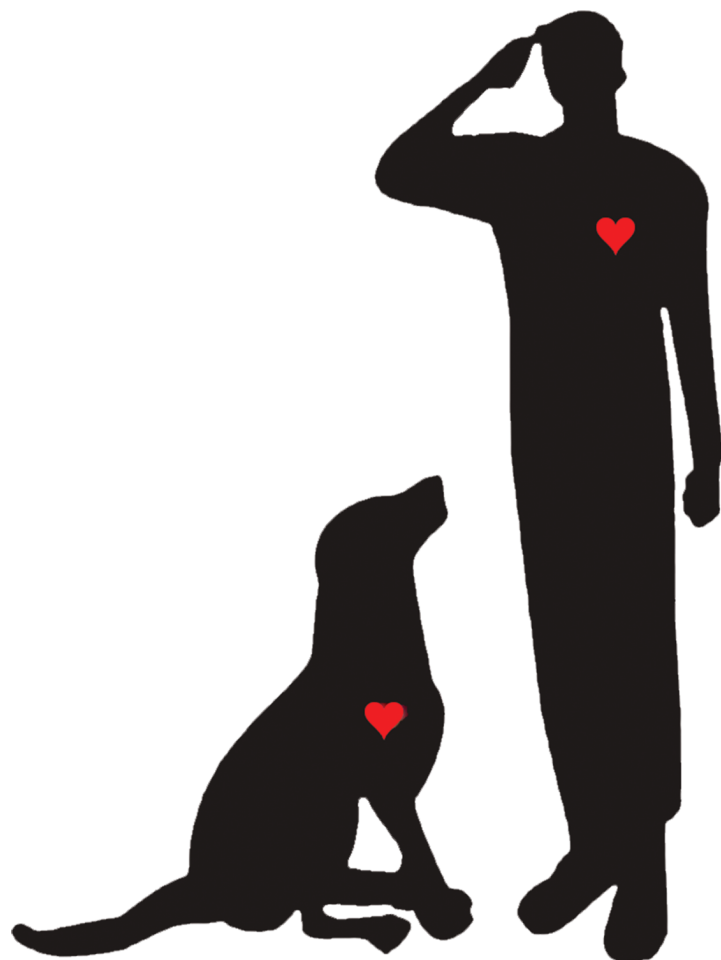
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