

GAMEDAY
PREVIEW

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GEORGIA
VS. **ALABAMA**

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Thursday, September 25, 2025



The Georgia defense celebrates a sack during the opening home game against Marshall University at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Aug. 30, 2025. PHOTO/ETHAN GREENE

A3

**LOOKING FOR
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THE CRIMSON TIDE?

A5

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Kirby's Kryptonite

Smart looks to improve 1-6 record

Riley Baugh

Kirby Smart has built Georgia into one of the most consistent programs in college football. The Bulldogs have won two national championships in his tenure as head coach, they recruit as well as anyone and develop future NFL starters. Alabama, however, has been the one matchup he can't quite ease past.

Since taking over in Athens in late 2015, Smart is 1-6 against the Crimson Tide, but his history with Alabama runs deeper than a head-to-head record. Smart spent nine seasons under legendary head coach Nick Saban in Tuscaloosa, serving as defensive coordinator for four of Alabama's national championships. That foundation, the recruiting model, the defensive principles, his organizational blueprint and even the way he conducts his practices all came from Smart's time on Saban's staff.

The rivalry between Smart and the Crimson Tide started during the 2017 season, when Georgia nearly stole the national championship from Smart's old boss in only his second season at the helm of the Bulldogs. Georgia controlled stretches of the game and were even up by two scores going into halftime, only to watch Alabama freshman quarterback Tua Tagovailoa get the nod to start the third quarter and end it in overtime with a 41-yard touchdown pass to wide receiver and future Heisman Trophy winner DeVonta Smith. The 26-23 loss proved something that quickly became a trend: Georgia could hang with Alabama, but winning was another matter.



Georgia head coach Kirby Smart during the 2023 SEC Championship game between Georgia and Alabama at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, Georgia, on Saturday, Dec. 2, 2023. Alabama won 27-24. PHOTO/MADY MERTENS

19

Kirby Smart has lost only 19 games as the Bulldogs' head coach – Alabama makes up almost a third of them.

The next few meetings followed a pattern. In the 2018 SEC Championship, Georgia led in the fourth quarter until Alabama quarterback Jalen Hurts, in a twist eerily similar to Tagovailoa's heroics in the previous meeting, replaced Tagovailoa at quarterback, flipped the game and guided the Crimson Tide to a 35-28 win in Atlanta. Two years later in Tuscaloosa, the Bulldogs led going into halftime but gave way in the third quarter, losing 41-24. The same scoreline showed up again in the 2021 SEC title game, when Alabama toppled Georgia with explosive plays through the air. By then, Smart had lost four straight to the Crimson

Tide, each with stretches where his team looked capable before slipping late.

The breakthrough came weeks later in Indianapolis. After losing to Alabama in December, Georgia got another shot in the national title game. Georgia quarterback Stetson Bennett IV threw two late touchdowns and cornerback Kelee Ringo sealed the championship with a pick-six as Georgia won 33-18. Smart finally got over the hump, and Georgia had its first national championship in more than four decades.

That night could have signaled a shift, but the next few meetings have suggested otherwise. Meeting again in the 2023 SEC Championship, with a 29-game win streak on the line, Georgia lost again to the Crimson Tide, 27-24. The loss knocked the Bulldogs out of the 2023 College Football Playoff picture. Then last year, under new head coach Kalen DeBoer, Alabama jumped all over Georgia early. The Bulldogs trailed 28-0 at one point in the first half with their offense stuck in neutral and their defense unable to contain Alabama quarterback Jalen Milroe. At halftime, it was 30-7, and the game looked like it was over.

Instead, Georgia clawed back. Bulldogs quarterback Carson Beck settled in, the defense forced stops and Georgia slowly chipped away. By the fourth quarter, Georgia had cut the deficit to five, and then took the lead on a 67-yard strike from Beck to receiver Dillon Bell. After the under-

whelming first half, multiple turnovers and defensive breakdowns, Georgia was in front 34-33.

But once again, Alabama roared back. Milroe found Alabama receiver Ryan Williams for a 75-yard touchdown to open the following drive, and the Crimson Tide intercepted Beck in the end zone to seal their win over the Bulldogs. The 41-34 loss snapped Georgia's 42-game regular-season winning streak and reinforced a familiar theme that even when Georgia pushes back, Alabama controls the narrative.

That backdrop makes every meeting feel heavier. It's not just another SEC opponent. Smart has only lost 19 games as the head coach of the Bulldogs — Alabama makes up almost a third of them. The rivalry has defined the major swings of his career, from overtime heartbreak to triumph to last season's collapse.

Now Georgia hosts Alabama for the first time since 2015. The Bulldogs enter with the higher ranking, coming off a bye week and a big road win over Tennessee. However, the Crimson Tide proved last year that even under a new regime, they still have Smart's number, and they have all the weapons to trip him up again this season, with the potential to snap Georgia's 33-win home winning streak. For all Georgia has accomplished under him, this game is another reminder that his dynasty is still measured, in part, by Alabama.



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Georgia wide receiver Arian Smith (11) scores a touchdown during the Georgia vs. Alabama game at Bryant-Denny Stadium in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, on Saturday, Sept. 28, 2024. Alabama won 41-34.

PHOTO/LANEY MARTIN

Tide rolls into Sanford

Previewing Georgia vs. Alabama

Ben Kule

Following a hectic 44-41 overtime victory over Tennessee at Neyland Stadium, Georgia football returns home and will face Alabama on Saturday at 7:30 p.m. Tennessee exploited some of Georgia's weaknesses, but the Bulldogs showcased their ability to rally from behind and steal a win on the road. Georgia now enters its second SEC game ranked No. 5 and 3-0, while Alabama enters ranked No. 17 and 2-1. Both teams had a bye in Week 4.

Last year's instant classic

While Georgia has faced Alabama twice in the national championship game and three times in the SEC Championship Game since 2018, the 2024 matchup was just the second regular-season matchup between the two since 2015. The Jalen Milroe-led Crimson Tide overwhelmed the Bulldogs early, storming to a 28-0 lead. Georgia finally answered with a touchdown in the second quarter, but a safety put the Bulldogs behind 30-7 at halftime.

Alabama remained in the driver's seat until the fourth quarter, when the Crimson Tide punted on three consecutive drives, and Georgia capitalized with three touchdowns in a row. Miraculously, the Bulldogs pulled ahead when a 67-yard Dillon Bell touchdown gave them a 34-33 lead in the final minute. However, Alabama wide receiver Ryan Williams scored a highlight-reel 75-yard touchdown to reclaim the lead, and a Carson Beck interception gave the Crimson Tide a 41-34 victory. According to ESPN, Alabama's win percentage was as high as 99.4%, then fell to 33.2%, then came to rest at 100%.

The loss was the sixth time Alabama defeated Georgia in a span of seven games. It was also the first time the Crimson Tide took on the Bulldogs with Kalen DeBoer as their head coach. Georgia head coach Kirby Smart served on Nick Saban's Alabama coaching staff, so when Smart faced Saban, Alabama was likely well-prepared for Georgia's

game plan. With Saban retired and Alabama not having home-field advantage this time, Georgia hopes the cards are in its favor for this year's faceoff.

Stockton ready to compete

Entering the season with little experience, Georgia quarterback Gunner Stockton faced criticism that he wasn't prepared to compete in the SEC. Stockton proved that narrative wrong against Tennessee, throwing for 304 yards and three touchdowns, rushing for 38 yards and one touchdown and converting in crucial situations.

Through his first three starts, Stockton has a quarterback rating of 89.1, according to ESPN. Only one SEC quarterback, Arkansas' Taylen Green, and four quarterbacks total rank above Stockton. His quarterback rating was especially high in his only career SEC start, posting a QBR of 93.5 in the shootout victory over the Volunteers.

While Stockton appears capable of competing against any defense, Alabama poses a new challenge. In its most recent game, Alabama put constant pressure on Wisconsin, preventing the Badgers' offense from scoring until the final six minutes of the game. In the previous game, the Crimson Tide shut out Louisiana-Monroe. Alabama showed vulnerability in its 31-17 loss to Florida State in Week 1, but even then held Seminoles quarterback Tommy Castellanos to just nine completions.

Alabama allowed Florida State to rush for 236 yards, however, with Castellanos leading his team. That could be a weakness that Stockton and the running back room could exploit to give Georgia the advantage.

Alabama's WR duo poses a threat

Georgia's defensive backs were easily its biggest flaw in its win over Tennessee. They couldn't defend the deep ball, as Volunteers quarterback Joey Aguilar threw for 371 yards and four touchdowns.

If this problem isn't solved, the Crimson Tide may punish

the Bulldogs even more than Tennessee did, giving Georgia no hope to come back this time. Alabama has two weapons at wide receiver Georgia must key in on: Ryan Williams and Germie Bernard.

Bernard was one of the only bright spots in Alabama's Week 1 loss, catching eight passes for 146 yards. He eclipsed 60 receiving yards in the next two games, scoring twice in both. Williams exited the Week 1 game early after suffering a concussion. After missing just one game, Williams returned without skipping a beat, catching five passes for 165 yards and two touchdowns in the victory over Wisconsin.

Georgia defensive backs Ellis Robinson IV and Daniel Harris particularly struggled in man coverage in Week 3. Tennessee exploited this by using a quick tempo, making it difficult for Georgia to make defensive substitutions between plays. If Alabama uses a similar strategy, Georgia will have to be sharp defensively regardless of who is on the field each play.

89.1

Gunner Stockton has a quarterback rating of 89.1 through three games – the fifth-highest of all Division 1 quarterbacks and second-highest in the SEC, according to ESPN.

Georgia linebackers look to stuff the run

While Alabama's passing attack could be problematic for Georgia, the Bulldogs' linebackers have been impressive against the run all season. Marshall rushed for just 78 total yards against Georgia and Austin Peay rushed for 45. Even when the defense seemingly fell apart, only 125 rushing yards were surrendered to Tennessee. Linebackers Raylen Wilson and CJ Allen have the most tackles this season, with 23 and 22, respectively. All four of Georgia's sacks so far this season were recorded by linebackers — Wilson and Allen have one each and Chris Cole has two.

Meanwhile, Alabama's run game hasn't impressed. The Crimson Tide rushed for fewer than 90 yards against both Florida State and Wisconsin. Alabama often used designed runs for dual-threat quarterback Jalen Milroe last season, but has done so less since new starting quarterback Ty Simpson took over.

However, Alabama standout running back Jamarion "Jam" Miller will return from injury against Georgia. Miller totaled 823 all-purpose yards and eight touchdowns last season, including a score against the Bulldogs. Miller's return could add a new element to Alabama's run game not seen thus far.

Prediction

Georgia's defensive backs are historically reliable, and Smart is known for his effective defensive adjustments, so a bounce-back game could be in line despite Alabama's strong passing attack. That, accompanied by the Bulldogs' linebackers and defensive line bottling up the run, could lead to offensive struggles for the Crimson Tide.

Stockton lacked time in the pocket against Tennessee, and the same will likely happen against Alabama. Georgia's offensive line remains a concern and may handicap the Bulldogs' ability to string together chunk plays.

While some college football fans may expect a back-and-forth high-scoring affair like Georgia's last matchup, the Bulldogs will likely defend the pass better than they did against Tennessee, and Alabama's defensive line will disrupt Stockton, forcing plenty of drives to end in punts or turnovers.

The result may be a tight, relatively low-scoring contest. The game can easily come down to the last possession, with a touchdown or field goal in the final minute making the difference.

Prediction: Georgia 23, Alabama 20



Georgia wide receiver Dillon Bell (86) during the Georgia vs. Alabama game at Bryant-Denny Stadium in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, on Saturday, Sept. 28, 2024.

PHOTO/LANEY MARTIN



Wide receiver Marcus Rosemy-Jacksaint (1) celebrates after a touchdown against Tennessee at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Nov. 5, 2022. FILE/STAFF



Fans cheer during the game between Georgia and Georgia Tech at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Friday, Nov. 29, 2024. PHOTO/JAXON MEEKS

Fortress between the hedges

Remembering some of Sanford’s greatest matchups

Romell Williams

Few venues in college football rival the pageantry, noise and intimidation factor of Sanford Stadium. Nestled in the center of Athens, the 93,033-seat venue has long been the beating heart of Georgia football. The stadium has seen the Bulldogs rise from a sleeping giant into one of the nation’s most dominant programs under head coach Kirby Smart.

In recent years, Sanford Stadium has hosted some of the most memorable games in Georgia history. From dethroning the nation’s No. 1 team, to setting attendance records, to playing the longest game in SEC history, these contests have cemented the stadium’s reputation as one of college football’s premier stages.

Even more impressive, Georgia hasn’t lost a home game since 2019 — a streak that now spans more than five full seasons. Here’s a look back at three of the biggest games in recent Sanford Stadium memory.

No. 3 Georgia vs. No. 7 Notre Dame (Sept. 21, 2019): A record crowd

Before Georgia’s dynasty was fully realized, Sanford Stadium still showcased its unmatched atmosphere on one of the sport’s biggest stages. When No. 3 Georgia hosted No. 7 Notre Dame in 2019, anticipation built for months. The Fighting Irish’s visit to Athens was only the third time the two storied programs had ever met and the first time Notre Dame played “between the hedges.”

Georgia fans turned out in full force. The announced attendance of 93,246 set a stadium record, with thousands more gathering outside just to be near the atmosphere. The red stadium lights and “light show” debut — fans waving their phone flashlights in sync after dark — added to the spectacle, creating one of the most iconic visuals in Sanford history.

The crowd wasn’t just loud — it was disruptive. Notre Dame was flagged for five false starts, struggling to communicate amid the deafening noise. Georgia’s defense fed off the energy, and the Bulldogs escaped with a hard-fought 23-17 win. In retrospect, this game marked a turning point, showing the college football world that Athens is a gauntlet, not just another stop on the schedule.

No. 3 Georgia vs. No. 1 Tennessee (Nov. 5, 2022): Toppling No. 1

Fast-forward three years, and Sanford Stadium once again played host to a seismic matchup. In November 2022, Georgia welcomed top-ranked Tennessee, whose high-

flying offense had stunned Alabama earlier that season. The Volunteers entered Athens riding a wave of hype, but the Bulldogs — and their fans — were ready.

What followed was a masterclass in intimidation. Rain poured down, the decibel levels peaked and Tennessee never found its rhythm. Volunteers quarterback Hendon Hooker was pressured all afternoon by Georgia’s defense, while multiple Tennessee penalties were attributed to crowd noise.

The Bulldogs rolled to a 27-14 victory, reclaiming their spot atop the rankings and reminding the college football world of Sanford Stadium’s impact. The win also proved pivotal, keeping Georgia on track for another SEC and national championship. Fans still talk about the game as one of the loudest in Sanford history, a perfect storm of crowd energy and on-field dominance.

No. 7 Georgia vs. Georgia Tech (Nov. 29, 2024): The eight-overtime epic

While nonconference rivalries sometimes take a back seat in the playoff era, the 2024 edition of Clean, Old-Fashioned Hate ensured no one would forget its importance. When Georgia and Georgia Tech squared off in Athens, few could have predicted what was about to unfold: the longest game ever played by an ACC or SEC school.

The battle stretched into eight overtimes and past midnight, shattering records and testing the stamina of players and fans alike. Sanford Stadium, already buzzing for the rivalry atmosphere, turned into a cauldron of nerves and noise with every overtime possession.

Ultimately, Georgia prevailed, adding another chapter to its dominance over its in-state rival. The game wasn’t just historic because of its length — it embodied the grit, resilience and home-field advantage that have defined Georgia’s run of success. Fans poured onto the streets of Athens, celebrating a victory that will be retold for generations.

A fortress between the hedges

These three games illustrate why Sanford Stadium has become a fortress. Since losing to South Carolina at home in 2019, Georgia has rattled off a remarkable 33-game win streak in Athens, protecting its turf against all challengers.

As Georgia continues its pursuit of championships, Sanford Stadium remains the program’s heartbeat — where history is written, rivalries are settled and the Bulldogs remind everyone why Athens is one of college football’s most feared destinations.

NUMBERS TO KNOW: Week 5

Georgia quarterback Gunner Stockton

#14

So far in the 2025 season, Stockton has shown excellent ball security and efficiency. He’s thrown for 721 yards with no interceptions and has been dangerous both through the air and on the ground. He also proved his ability to accurately throw the ball downfield in Georgia’s win over Tennessee, so Alabama will have to respect that. If the Crimson Tide can’t pressure him well, Georgia’s offense could consistently sustain drives — and the Bulldogs are perfect in the red zone this season.

Alabama quarterback Ty Simpson

Simpson has been sharp to begin the season. With nearly 900 passing yards and zero interceptions so far, he presents a clean, efficient threat. While Simpson has protected the ball well, his completion percentage drops from 79.1% when the pocket is clean to 50% when he is under pressure. Georgia should look to force mistakes by bringing blitzes and collapsing the pocket on Simpson.

#15

Georgia wide receiver Zachariah Branch

#1

Branch has averaged over 16 yards per catch this season, including a long reception of 47 yards. His top-end speed and shiftiness make him a threat in open space, and he can change a drive’s momentum in one play. Georgia often puts Branch in motion and gets him the ball quickly via screens, so Alabama’s secondary must pay close attention to him every time he’s lined up.

Alabama wide receiver Ryan Williams

Fresh off of a breakout freshman season and five catches for 165 yards and two touchdowns against Wisconsin, Williams has proven he can stretch defenses. If he gets open deep or against single coverage, he could force Georgia to change how they defend, opening up options for others. Georgia’s cornerbacks have struggled in single coverage this season, so the Bulldogs’ safeties will likely need to have elite eye discipline and positioning to help with taking away Williams’ deep threat.

#2

Georgia safety KJ Bolden

#4

Bolden recorded 59 total tackles as a freshman in 2024 — the fifth-most on the team — while also making several key pass breakups and special teams contributions. His early 2025 performances show consistent involvement, as he is third on the team in tackles and has been reliable in pass coverage. Bolden’s ability to disrupt passing lanes and help on special teams could be a difference-maker, especially against Alabama’s big-play potential.

Alabama linebacker Deontae Lawson

Lawson is a strong run defender and tackler. In 2024, he had 76 tackles, including seven for loss, and consistently made big plays inside the tackles, anchoring Alabama’s front seven. Lawson dominated the Bulldogs in last season’s game, recording a team-high 10 tackles, with two for loss, and a sack. Georgia will need to test Lawson’s discipline with a creative run scheme — using misdirections, run-pass options and quarterback reads — to avoid being shut down in close quarters.

#0

By Romell Williams

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CORRECTIONS

In the Sept. 18 print edition, on page A1, there was an error regarding the spelling of the name of a source in the caption of a photo. We regret this error and it has since been corrected online. As a student-run news organization with the mission of training journalists, we know that mistakes happen and we do our best to correct them as quickly as possible. If you spot a factual error, please let us know by sending a correction to editor@randb.com. Corrections to items in print editions are published in the next possible print issue. Corrections for online-only articles are posted at redandblack.com/corrections.

All eyes on Everette

Georgia's senior cornerback looks for revenge against Alabama

Owen McDaniel

Few players will have a more difficult task in Saturday's Georgia-Alabama game than Bulldogs cornerback Daylen Everette. In his third year starting, Everette will be asked

to cover one of the nation's top receiver duos in Germie Bernard and Ryan Williams — the latter of whom torched Everette and the Georgia secondary for 177 yards last season. Everette was the Bulldogs' most-targeted defensive back in that game, and he allowed five catches for 61 yards.

Two of those receptions were made by Williams, including a 21-yard catch-and-run in which he slipped past Everette with a shifty open-field move.

However, Everette turned a page in the back half of the season, allowing just 30.2 yards per game in the final seven games. He was named MVP of the SEC Championship game after his two-interception performance against Texas and was a Coaches Third-Team All-SEC selection. In the offseason, he grew into his role as a leader and tone-setter in the defense.

"I'm really grateful just to be one of those guys on the defense that people see as a leader," Everette said at SEC Media Days. "I'm just trying to do a better job at that — just seeing where I can grow as a leader, where I can help other people on the defense, and just help bring everyone together."

Everette's experience has helped him embrace that leadership role. Ahead of the Tennessee game, Everette said he told his younger teammates what it would be like at Neyland Stadium and tried to prepare them. Everette's teammates have taken notice of his wealth of knowledge and importance to the team.

"Daylen is a veteran," sophomore safety KJ Bolden said. "He's a fourth year, he knows the ins and outs of the program. He's a great leader, he's hard-working, he's very focused. So, having Daylen this year is gonna be big for us — his experience, knowing everything, getting guys lined up."

Everette has led by example so far this season, allowing an average of just 22 yards per game. He was one of Georgia's few reliable defensive backs against Tennessee — a game in which the Bulldogs allowed nine passes of 15 yards or more. His consistency will be tested again when the Crimson Tide comes to Athens. Bernard and Williams have combined for 25 receptions for 470 yards through three games this season, and Williams' 19.5 yards per reception is fifth-best in the conference.

Everette's role in the game is even further amplified by the instability of the Georgia secondary this season. The Bulldogs have allowed 14.3 yards per completion and 250 passing yards per game thus far, both of which rank in the bottom 50 of college football and the bottom three of the SEC. Outside of Everette, Georgia's cornerback position has been particularly shaky this year. In the Tennessee game, the Bulldogs' first test against an elite offense, junior Daniel Harris allowed three receptions for 76 yards and redshirt freshman Ellis Robinson IV got burned for a 72-yard touchdown on the Volunteers' second drive.

"It was nothing they were doing, it was something we were doing — we were just killing ourselves," Bolden said. "So, we told ourselves to stay composed. Coach Smart told us to stay composed, look at our keys, trust in each other and do our jobs."

If Saturday's game is anything like that Week 3 shootout, Everette's play could have a major impact on the Georgia secondary's composure. If Everette can eliminate options for Alabama quarterback Ty Simpson, that will allow the safeties to provide more support to the other cornerbacks and alleviate some of the pressure on them. It's a steep challenge against the Crimson Tide's elite receiving corps, but the Bulldogs' CB1 is battle-tested and has stood tall in the spotlight in the past.



Georgia defensive back Daylen Everette (6) in action during the first half of the Georgia vs. Texas game at the Darrell K Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium in Austin, Texas, on Saturday, Oct. 19, 2024. PHOTO/LANEY MARTIN

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ACROSS

1. Peat sources

5. Weak and wan

11. Meadow

14. Capital of Germany?

15. Hardly, if ever

16. Most junk mail

17. Clay-pigeon launcher

18. Fantasies

20. Aesop's thistle-eater

21. Feds like Ness

22. Moulin Rouge attraction

23. Closet collection

25. Venus and Serena, e.g.

26. Grinders, of a sort

28. Game with a jackpot

29. Put on a pedestal

30. Evil's root, it's said

31. Budgetary excess

34. Check for letters?

35. Perfectly clear

36. Spice

37. Book's last word

38. Aleutian attire

39. Buddhist concept

40. Uses a pacifier

41. Fall foliage shade

42. Pungent relish

45. Florentine poet

46. What mechanics do

DOWN

47. Crooned

48. Put away the dishes?

51. Imploring

53. Glazed unit

54. Solidly behind

55. Batter's position

56. Sum for a hand

57. Like Oz's woodman

58. Got nervous

59. Divas often have big ones

27. Burly bovines

28. Places for oars

30. Like swamp water

31. Having better than 20/20 vision

32. Cartoon mail-order company

33. An udder thing

35. Mangle

36. Spar on a yacht

38. Least robust

39. ____ fu

40. Paparazzi target

41. Covered ground

42. Moved like rush-hour traffic

43. French artist Matisse

44. Sinclair with a Pulitzer

45. Cap of yore

47. Gluttony and lust

49. Chorister's voice

50. Driver's gizmos

52. Beachgoers often get one

53. Initials of a noted "Wizard"

© Lovatts Puzzles

Highlights from Georgia against Austin Peay



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Liam W. Dreesen

Week 2 against Austin Peay also had lackluster attendance. However, the start time was changed the day of the

None of these problems will arise when Alabama comes

But the point remains the same: Georgia fans, especially the students, continue to have poor turnouts when the game is not against a top-tier opponent. Despite the team being the best it has been in its storied history and being the best college football team in the last half-decade, fans are taking it for granted.

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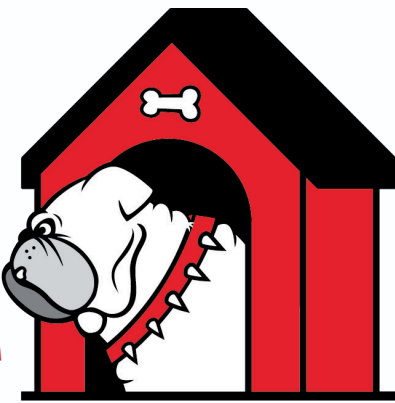


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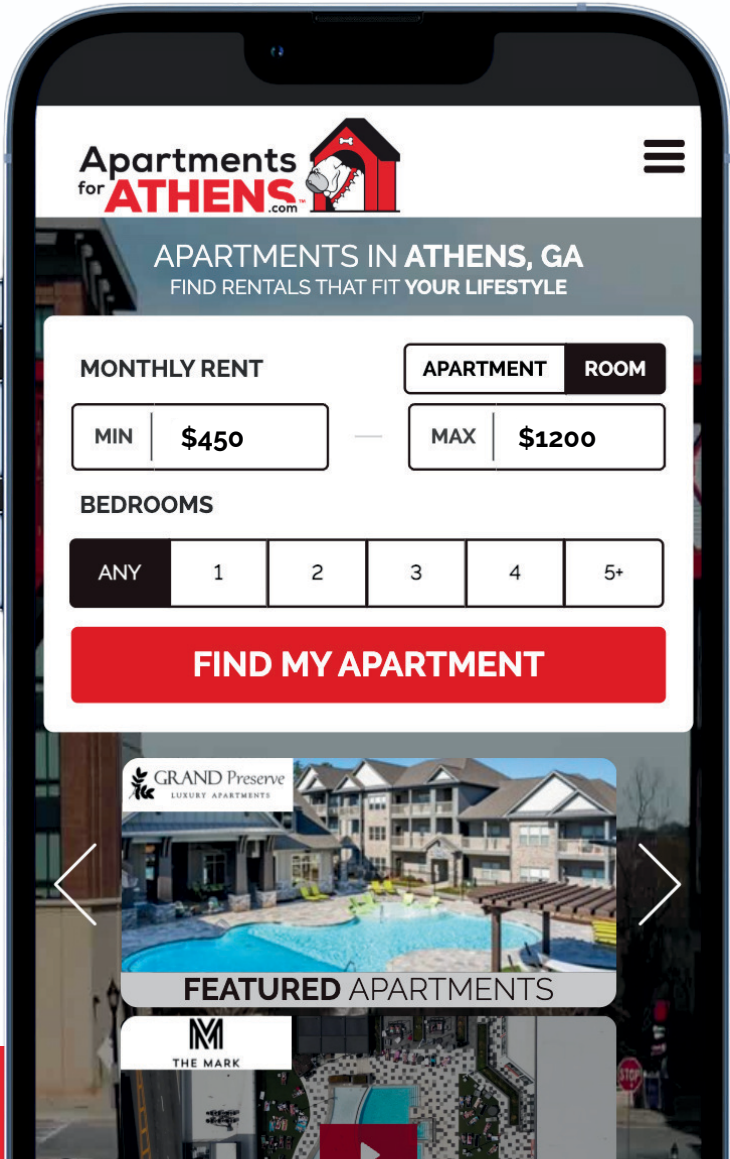
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