

# TIDE TURNED

GEORGIA DEFEATS ALABAMA 28-7



Georgia players celebrate after winning the SEC championship game against Alabama at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta on Saturday, Dec. 6, 2025. Georgia won 28-7. PHOTO/KATHERINE DAVIS



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Georgia outside linebacker Quintavious Johnson (33) celebrates after a sack during the SECCG against Alabama at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta on Saturday, Dec. 6, 2025. PHOTO/KATHERINE DAVIS

# Turning up the pressure

How Georgia's pass rush stifled Alabama

Owen McDaniel

Following Georgia's 28-7 victory over Alabama in the SEC championship game, Crimson Tide quarterback Ty Simpson said that felt like the Bulldogs were bringing an extra pass rusher on almost every down. Simpson was pressed back onto his heels all game, as Georgia's pass rush constantly broke through the Alabama offensive line and forced the Crimson Tide's pocket passer to play mobile.

The Bulldogs recorded 20 pressures, meaning they disrupted Simpson's rhythm on 34.9% of his dropbacks, according to Pro Football Focus. That was the second-highest total they have logged all season, only behind their 29 pressures in their Week 12 rout of Texas. The result was one of Simpson's worst games of the year. The junior signal caller completed a season-low 48.7% of his passes and was limited to just 53 passing yards in the first half, while Georgia jumped out to a 14-0 lead.

Alabama received the opening kickoff of the second half — an opportunity for it to get back within one score and regain some control over the game. However, on the second play of the drive, Georgia defensive lineman Joseph Jonah-Ajonye manhandled Crimson Tide left tackle Ka-

dyn Proctor, pushing him all the way back until his heels collided with Simpson's. Simpson was forced to spin out of the pocket, and with several Bulldogs in close pursuit, he tried to make an off-platform throw that ultimately sailed out of bounds. The next play, Georgia safety JaCorey Thomas crept up to the line and then accelerated untouched into the backfield, sacking Simpson for a 9-yard loss. The Bulldogs' pass rush made plays like those throughout the game, and they helped keep the Georgia sideline and crowd energized.

"I was proud of [Thomas], you saw what he did on that sack," Georgia cornerback Daylen Everette said after the game. "It just turned everybody up on the field and on the sideline."


The Bulldogs finished the game with three sacks, tied for their highest all season, and held Alabama to a 23.08% conversion rate on third down. It was a major improvement from when the two teams faced off in September — the Crimson Tide went 13-for-19 on third down and Simpson was never sacked. In fact, the SEC title game was a reflection of the jump the Georgia pass rush has made down the stretch.

In the first two months of the season, the Bulldogs averaged just 1.25 sacks per game, which was tied for ninth

worst in the nation. The defensive front looked like it may have turned a corner with a two-sack, 17-pressure performance against Kentucky in Week 6, but the next three games told a different story, as Georgia registered just one combined sack against Auburn, Ole Miss and Florida. Following the Florida game, Jonah Ajonye said in a media availability that the team was heavily focused on getting more production from the pass rush.

That extra attention finally paid off against Mississippi State in Week 11, as the Bulldogs tallied three sacks. They carried that momentum into the next week against Texas, which was the most complete performance from the pass rush to date. As has been the case for most of head coach Kirby Smart's tenure, the dominance over the Longhorns' offensive line was a group effort, rather than a one-man show. Six different Bulldogs posted two or more pressures, putting Texas quarterback Arch Manning under pressure for over 40% of his dropbacks.

The pass rush has used that late-season surge to completely suffocate opposing offenses. Georgia has allowed just two touchdowns in its past four games, and it is averaging 18.5 pressures per game during that stretch. If the Bulldogs can sustain this upswing, it will make them a formidable opponent in the playoffs.



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# Crimson conquered

## Georgia bests Alabama to win back-to-back SEC titles

Owen McDaniel

With the clock ticking down below 10 seconds and no timeouts in hand, No. 3 Georgia needed eight yards to topple No. 2 Alabama in the 2012 SEC title game and supplant the Crimson Tide in the BCS national championship. Quarterback Aaron Murray received the snap, looked right and fired toward wide receiver Chris Conley, who was running a 3-yard out route. However, the ball was tipped at the line, and Conley fell to the ground as he hauled it in off the deflection. With no way to stop the clock, the Bulldogs had to stand and watch the final five seconds bleed down as they came up five yards short of their first national championship appearance since 1980. Thirteen years and four losses to Alabama in Atlanta later, Georgia finally got its comeuppance, dominating the Crimson Tide in all three phases of the game to seize a commanding 28-7 victory on Saturday, Dec. 6.

“These fans have been through a lot of heartache and agony in these games, but not tonight, baby, not tonight,” head coach Kirby Smart said moments before the confetti poured down onto the field and the Bulldogs received their third SEC championship trophy in four years.

### Offense feeds off of other phases

After conservative play calling and a steady Alabama defense led to punts on Georgia's first two drives of the game, the Bulldog offense came to life. Gifted favorable field position courtesy of a blocked punt by receiver Cole Speer, the offense quickly backed the Crimson Tide down to their own goal line. On third-and-goal from the 1-yard line, Roderick Robinson II slipped out of the backfield on a play fake and quarterback Gunner Stockton found him in the end zone for the game's first score. Alabama quarterback Ty Simpson threw an interception on the next drive, and the Bulldogs capitalized again, as Stockton connected with receiver Dillon Bell over the middle for a 5-yard score to jump out to a 14-0 lead, which Georgia took into halftime.

Though the Bulldogs ended the first half with two more punts, they came out of the locker room in rhythm. Following a quick defensive stop and 24-yard punt return from wideout Zachariah Branch, Stockton orchestrated a 6-play, 40-yard scoring drive punctuated by a 9-yard Nate Frazier rushing touchdown. The counter handoff was set up seamlessly by a big push from the Georgia offensive line and a key block on the edge by wide receiver London Humphreys.

The Bulldogs then hit a lull, as they gained just 42 yards across their next three possessions, all of which resulted in punts. However, a defensive stop on fourth down gave Georgia the ball on the Alabama 12-yard line with just over eight minutes remaining. After two unsuccessful runs, the Bulldogs let Branch do what he does best — make something out of nothing when the ball is in his hands. Branch



Georgia wide receiver Dillon Bell (86) celebrates with his team after a touchdown during the SEC championship game between Georgia and Alabama at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta on Saturday, Dec. 6, 2012. PHOTO/KALEB TATUM

caught a screen pass from a heavily-pressured Stockton and navigated through traffic, finding an opening and accelerating to the end zone to extend the lead to 28-7 and effectively put the game away.

Georgia got the ball back one last time late in the fourth quarter, and a 19-yard rush from Chauncey Bowens, who appeared sporadically due to his nagging injury, picked up the first down and sealed the win.

Stockton completed 20 of 26 passes for 156 yards and three scores and added 13 rushes for 39 yards. Branch led the Bulldog pass catchers with five receptions for 53 yards and a score, while Frazier paced the running back room with 52 yards and a touchdown on 13 carries.

### Defense leaves no doubt

Unlike many past editions of the series, Georgia's defense never let Alabama take control of the game. The Crimson Tide's longest drive of the first half was just six plays, and it resulted in an interception from Bulldog cornerback Daylen Everette.

The defense continued its dominance into the second half, shutting out Alabama for over three quarters. The Crimson Tide received the opening kickoff, but Georgia quickly stifled their drive, as safety JaCorey Thomas blitzed and sacked quarterback Ty Simpson to force a three-and-out. The Bulldogs extended their lead to 21-0 after the punt, then disconnected offensive plays, penalties and a relentless Georgia defense stymied Alabama's next two drives.

However, cornerback Demello Jones committed a pair of penalties that aided the Crimson Tide in scoring their first touchdown early in the fourth quarter. On second-and-1,

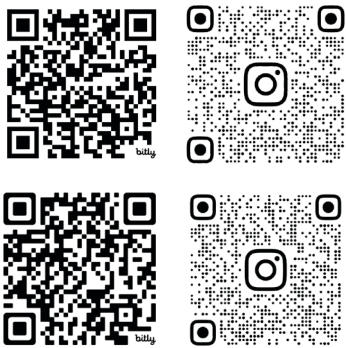
Bulldog edge rushers Quintavius Johnson and Chris Cole sacked Simpson for a 9-yard loss, but Jones was issued a personal foul after the play, gifting Alabama a first down and 15 yards. On a third down later in the drive, Simpson uncorked a deep ball to wideout Ryan Williams, and Jones dragged Williams down well before the ball arrived, resulting in a pass interference penalty. Three plays later, receiver Gernie Bernard caught a screen pass and broke multiple tackles en route to a 23-yard touchdown to cut Georgia's lead to 21-7.

The defense did not let Alabama turn that jab into anything substantial. Following an excellent punt from Brett Thorson, the Crimson Tide got the ball on their own 4-yard line with nine minutes remaining. The Bulldogs quickly forced them into fourth-and-2, and being down two scores, Alabama head coach Kalen DeBoer took a serious gamble and elected to go for it. Simpson attempted to hit Bernard on a short out route, but overthrew it, and Georgia took over on the Crimson Tide 12-yard line. Late in the game, the Bulldogs forced four consecutive Simpson incomplections to seal their first victory over Alabama in an SEC championship game.

The Georgia pass rush was dogged all game, sacking Simpson three times and pressuring him on 15 of 43 dropbacks. The constant penetration affected Simpson's accuracy, as he completed less than half of his passes. The Bulldogs also completely suffocated the Crimson Tide run game, as their leading rusher, Daniel Hill, carried the ball just four times for 11 yards and Alabama finished the game with minus-3 rushing yards because of the yardage lost from sacks.



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## Highlights from the 2025 SEC championship



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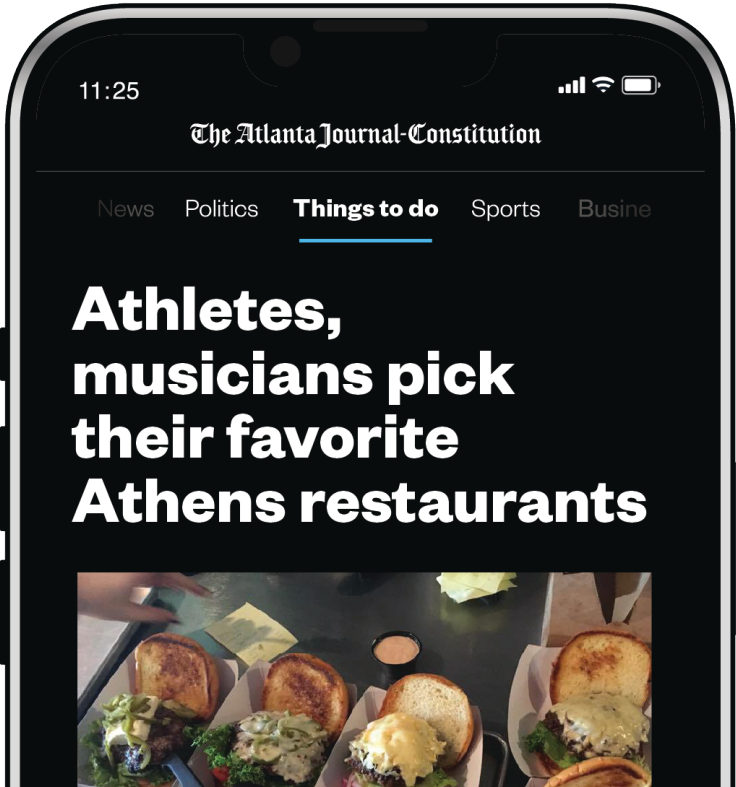






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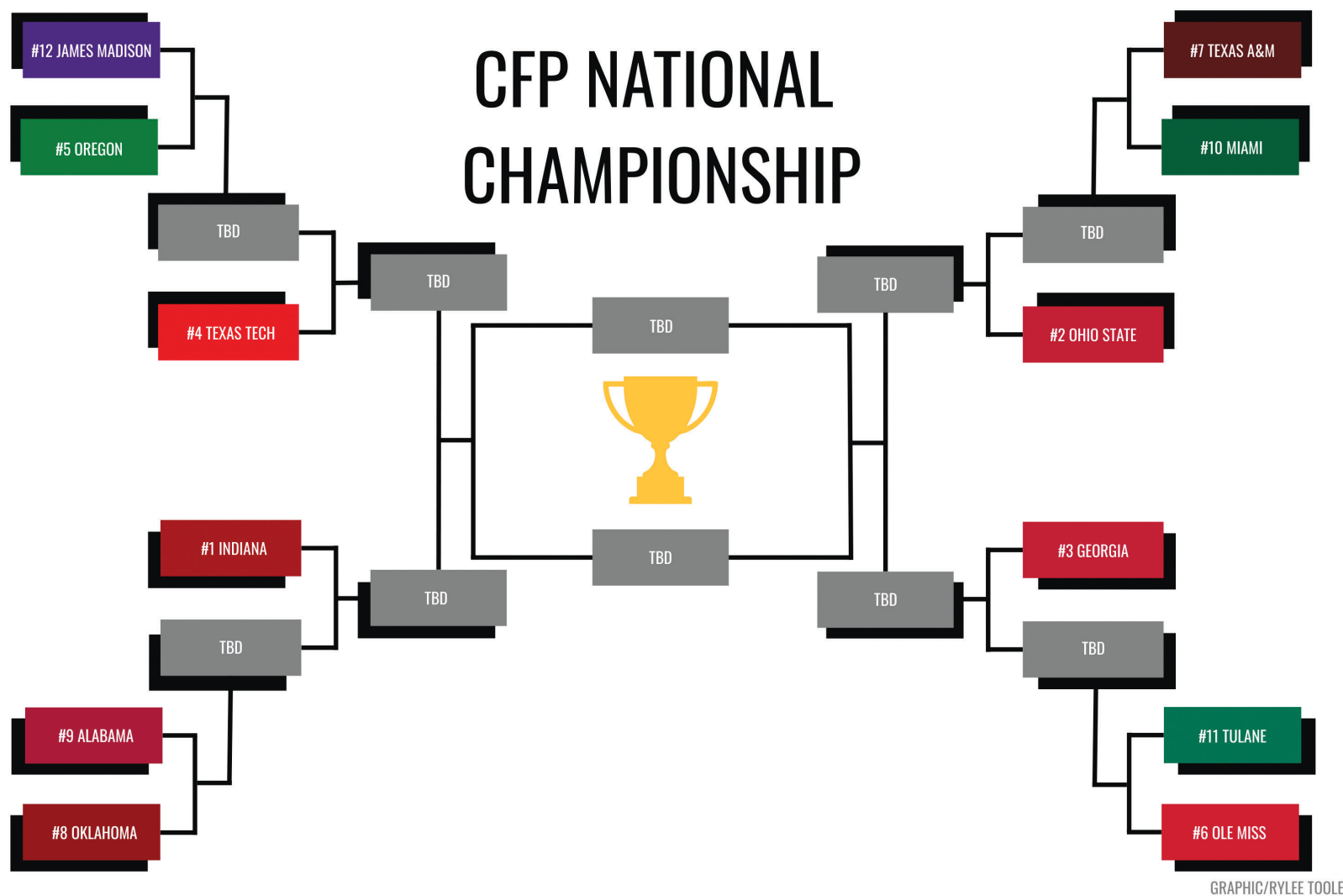


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# The College Football Playoff

# Explaining the history of college football's postseason schedule

Braden Brownell

The College Football Playoff committee ranked Georgia at No. 3 following the Bulldogs' 28-7 win over Alabama in the SEC championship game. For readers looking for clarity on how the postseason works, The Red & Black has assembled a guide to the playoff system.

## A brief history of postseason play

To understand today's format, it helps to trace how the sport arrived here. For most of the 20th century, college football relied on bowl games with rigid conference tie-ins. Matchups were based more on tradition than rankings, which made crowning a true national champion difficult. Early reform efforts — the Bowl Coalition from 1992-94 and the Bowl Alliance from 1995-97 — tried to pair the top teams but were limited because the Big Ten and Pac-10 champions were locked into the Rose Bowl due to an existing agreement. That restriction often prevented No. 1 vs. No. 2 games and led to frequent split-titles.

The Bowl Championship Series, or BCS, attempted to solve the problem in 1998 by using polls and computer formulas to select the top two teams. But the BCS quickly became controversial as undefeated teams were left out and computer rankings confused fans. Pressure for a play-off system continued to build until 2014, when the College Football Playoff, or CFP, introduced a four-team model with a selection committee. That format, while clearer, still excluded strong teams in certain years, prompting calls for change.

In 2024, the CFP expanded to a 12-team field, the largest postseason structure in the sport's history.

## What is the College Football Playoff?

The CFP is the system that crowns the national champion and determines matchups for the New Year's Six bowls: the Rose, Sugar, Orange, Cotton, Peach and Fiesta bowls. The selection committee ranks the top 25 teams beginning in Week 11 and releases weekly updates before finalizing the field after conference championship weekend.

## How teams qualify

The 12-team field consists of the five highest-ranked conference champions and the next seven highest-ranked teams, known as at-large selections. There is no cap on the number of teams from a single conference, but there must be representatives from at least five conferences. If fewer than five conference champions appear in the top 25, the remaining champions are still placed into the field to meet the requirement.

At least one champion must come from the Group of Five: Conference USA, the American Conference, Mid-American Conference, Mountain West Conference or Sun Belt Conference. This means a team outside the top 12 may still qualify based on its conference champion status. In the first year of the new seeding format, Tulane earned the No. 11 seed as No. 20 in the rankings, while James Madison entered as the No. 12 seed despite being ranked No. 24.

## The format and schedule

The top four highest-ranked teams, not necessarily conference champions, receive first-round byes. Nos. 5-8 host Nos. 9-12 on campus in mid-December. Winners advance to the quarterfinals, which rotate annually among the New Year's Six bowl sites.

Under the 2025-26 schedule, first-round games will be played Dec. 19-20. Quarterfinals will take place at the Cotton, Orange, Rose and Sugar Bowls on Dec. 31 and Jan. 1. The semifinals will be hosted by the Fiesta and Peach bowls on Jan. 8-9, and the national championship will be played on Monday, Jan. 19, at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami.

## Inside the selection committee

The CFP selection committee includes former coaches and players, athletics administrators, sitting athletic directors and journalists. Members serve three-year terms and must follow a strict recusal policy if they have personal or professional ties to a school under consideration. Their role is exclusively to evaluate teams, rank the top 25 and determine the playoff seeding.

The committee uses a seven-round balloting process that weighs strength of schedule, head-to-head results, common opponents and relevant circumstances such as injuries. Rankings are built in stages, beginning with the top four and ending with Nos. 23 through 25.

## Site selection

Quarterfinal and semifinal sites rotate among the New Year's Six bowls. When bowls are not hosting semifinals, their historic conference tie-ins influence placement. The SEC champion is traditionally placed in the Sugar Bowl, the Big Ten champion in the Rose Bowl, the ACC champion in the Orange Bowl and the Big 12 champion in the Sugar or Fiesta bowls based on the rotation. Other matchups are arranged by geography and seeding. Semifinals do not follow tie-ins, and the No. 1 seed is placed as close to home as possible. The national championship site is selected several years in advance through a bidding process.

# Bulldogs' sweet return to New Orleans

# Georgia football awaits No. 6 Ole Miss or No. 11 Tulane in Sugar Bowl

Riley Baugh

Georgia is heading back to a place that has defined its history — and its recent frustration. The Bulldogs earned the No. 3 seed in the College Football Playoff and will open their postseason run in the Sugar Bowl on Jan. 1, marking the program's 13th appearance in the bowl that has shaped eras of college football since 1935.

The Sugar Bowl carries meaning for Georgia beyond this upcoming matchup. It is where, in the 1980 season, the Bulldogs won their second national championship behind star freshman running back and Heisman Trophy winner Herschel Walker. Last year brought a different memory. No. 2 Georgia fell to No. 7 Notre Dame 23-10 in what was quarterback Gunner Stockton's first collegiate start — a team performance marred by turnovers and missed chances.

Now the Bulldogs arrive as back-to-back SEC champions, waiting to see whether No. 6 Ole Miss or No. 11 Tulane will join them at the Caesars Superdome on New Year's Day.

## No. 6 Ole Miss

Ole Miss presents the tougher matchup on paper. Georgia saw firsthand how thin the margin can be when battling the Rebels, overcoming a 9-point fourth quarter deficit to win 43-35 at home on Oct. 18. Stockton had statistically the best game of his career, throwing for 289 yards and four touchdowns and completing all 12 of his pass attempts with three scores in the second half. Georgia also controlled the ground with 221 rushing yards to the Rebels' 88 yards.

Still, Ole Miss is dangerous because of what it does through the air before finishing drives with its running game. The Rebels scored touchdowns on their first five drives in the regular season meeting, with the first three being on the ground after long 10-plus-play drives. They also went 5-for-5 on third downs in the first half. Quarterback Trinidad Chambliss threw for 3,016 yards and 18 touchdowns in the regular season and leads a top-3 passing attack built around vertical shots and extended plays. Nearly a quarter of Ole Miss' completions against Georgia gained at least 20 yards, and Chambliss, who was also the team's leading rusher in the game, stressed the Bulldogs in every phase.

The departure of head coach Lane Kiffin could change the dynamics of the team. Kiffin left for the LSU job on Nov. 30 and is widely regarded as one of the sport's most aggressive offensive minds who built an offense tailored to Chambliss' skill set. Under new head coach Pete Golding, formerly the defensive coordinator, Ole Miss may lose some of the tempo and unpredictability that defined its offensive identity. Chambliss remains capable of taking over a game, but the system around him may not operate at the same level with Kiffin gone.

Ole Miss defends the pass well but remains vulnerable against the run, an area Georgia exploited in October, with three players topping 50 rushing yards. If the Bulldogs control the line again, they can limit Chambliss' possessions and tilt the matchup toward their own rhythm.

## No. 11 Tulane

Tulane brings a different kind of test. The Green Wave are 11-2 and American Conference champions with a profile built on steadiness. They forced five turnovers in their 34-21 title game win over North Texas and rank among the national leaders in turnover rate, tackles for loss and yards per carry allowed since November.

Junior transfer quarterback Jake Retzlaff has thrown 2,862 yards with a 14-6 touchdown-to-interception ratio and has been sacked only eight times. Tulane rarely makes unforced errors, it is not first-class in one particular area but is solid in each and is the type of opponent that stays within reach and waits for mistakes. The Green Wave lacks the aggressiveness and capability of busting open big plays like some SEC teams have shown Georgia throughout the season, but they are consistent. Tulane is located in New

Orleans, meaning an advancement past the first round could set up a home-game atmosphere for the Green Wave. However, Tulane has a tall task ahead of it in the first round, as it must flip the script on Ole Miss, which clobbered the Green Wave 45-10 in September.

Head coach Jon Sumrall has accepted the head coach job at Florida, but will lead Tulane through the playoff, adding some uncertainty around preparation and focus.

## The volatility factor

Both Ole Miss and Tulane enter the playoff dealing with coaching and roster turnover. Some players may already be eyeing the portal or weighing NIL decisions. Others may treat the playoff as a free swing with nothing to protect and nothing to lose. That volatility can either unravel a team or make it unpredictable enough to challenge a higher seed.

Georgia does not really deal in volatility. The Bulldogs know how they want to play, lean on personnel they trust and handle pressure with structure. Ole Miss can strain Georgia's defense with its tempo and Tulane tests discipline across four quarters, but neither should force the Bulldogs out of their structure.



Georgia quarterback Gunner Stockton (14) scores a touchdown during a game against Ole Miss at Sanford Stadium in Athens on Saturday, Oct. 18, 2025. Georgia won 43-35. PHOTO/KATHERINE DAVIS





Georgia defensive back Ellis Robinson IV (1) celebrates an interception with his teammates during a game against Austin Peay at Sanford Stadium in Athens on Saturday, Sept. 6, 2025. PHOTO/ETHAN GREENE



Georgia defensive back Ellis Robinson IV (1) intercepts a pass during a game between Georgia and Georgia Tech at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta on Friday, Nov. 28, 2025. PHOTO/ETHAN GREENE

# Prospect to pillar

## Ellis Robinson IV emerges as a key piece to Georgia's defense

Ben Kule

Landing the highly touted cornerback Ellis Robinson IV out of IMG Academy was one of the biggest successes in Georgia recruiting history. According to 247Sports, Robinson was the No. 2 recruit behind Ohio State wide receiver Jeremiah Smith in the 2024 class, and despite 32 total offers and strong pushes from Miami and Alabama, he ultimately chose the Bulldogs.

As the second-highest-rated recruit in Georgia history, analysts expected that someone with so much promise would make an immediate impact, regardless of the depth chart ahead of him. That was not the case for Robinson, as he spent most of the year on the bench before redshirting.

With cornerbacks Daylen Everette, Daniel Harris and Demello Jones all set to return in 2025, Robinson would have to outperform his teammates in practice if he wanted to earn more playing time — and many started to worry he never would.

Head coach Kirby Smart said that fundamentals and a lack of stamina were holding Robinson back, but those things improved as the new season approached. In Week 2, Robinson recorded his first career interception against Austin Peay, signaling he may be ready to make that leap. The next week, he faced his first SEC opponent.

What seemed like a huge opportunity for Robinson was ultimately a disaster. Facing Tennessee on the road, Robinson lost his footing and slipped while covering wide receiver Chris Brazzell II on a deep route, leading to a 72-yard score early. When Georgia faced Alabama in its next game, Robinson was responsible for another touchdown in a tight loss.

Yet, just when all signs pointed to Robinson being an all-time recruiting letdown, his odyssey to stardom began.

The following week, Robinson bounced back with a strong performance against Kentucky, including four tackles, a pass deflection and a late interception to seal the victory. Over the next few games, his coverage consistently improved. Robinson broke up a pass in five of the last seven SEC games of the regular season, and despite some issues with penalties against Ole Miss, he was gaining Smart's trust.

By the end of the regular season, Robinson surpassed Harris and Jones as the preferred option alongside Everette, and the duo played exceptionally well. Over the last four weeks of the season, Georgia allowed just two passing touchdowns.

Additionally, Robinson's ball-hawking abilities were on full display, as he came down with an interception in each of the final two games of the regular season, including a

highlight-reel leaping grab against Georgia Tech.

The Bulldogs finished their 2025 regular season campaign with seven interceptions, and Robinson was responsible for four of them.

Robinson's momentum was not lost when Georgia returned to Atlanta to face Alabama for the second time and to compete for the SEC title. On the Crimson Tide's first drive, Robinson flew in to stuff wide receiver Lotzeir Brooks at the line of scrimmage on third-and-3 to force a punt. Robinson was targeted three times in coverage but allowed no catches and had two pass deflections, one of which came in the end zone early in the fourth quarter as he prevented wideout Ryan Williams from hauling in a touchdown pass.

Heading into the postseason, the margin for error is slimmer than ever. Georgia's pass rush has been more effective as of late, but strong pass coverage is still crucial for holding leads and preventing big plays. Jones has been featured in the secondary less recently, while Harris announced his plans to transfer on Nov. 30 and is likely out of the picture. With this, Robinson's play will be more essential than ever as Georgia makes a push for the national championship.

This season, Robinson has shown he can live up to the hype he once had as a recruit, and his early setbacks only show his resilience on the way to potentially becoming Georgia's next great shutdown cornerback.

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