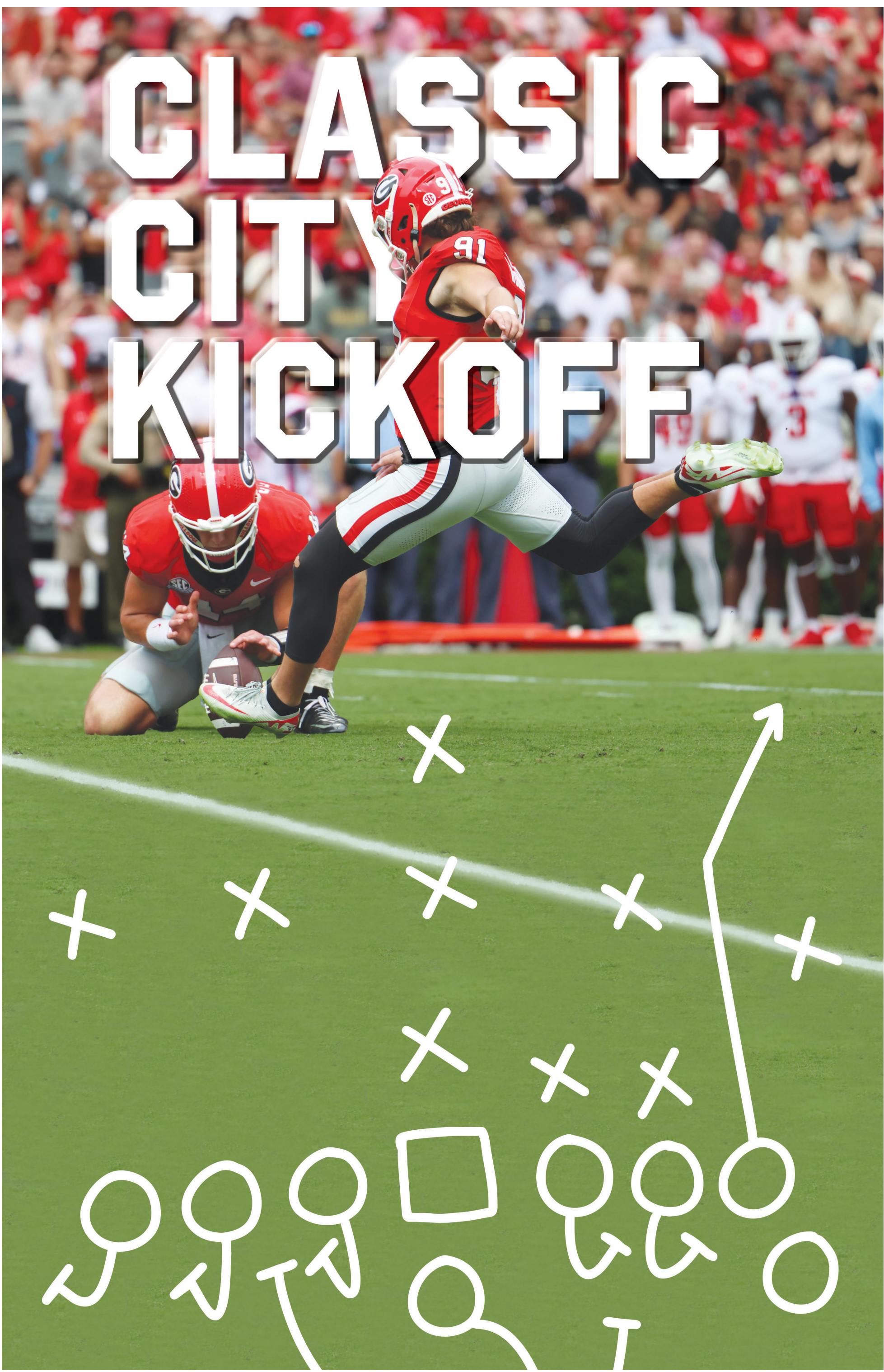




Peyton Woodring (91) kicks the ball during a game against Austin Peay State University at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Sept. 6, 2025. PHOTO/KATHERINE DAVIS, ILLUSTRATION/NORIN BORTZ

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Georgia football schedule overview

Georgia football enters the 2026 season in a familiar position: loaded with talent, led by head coach Kirby Smart and carrying national championship expectations. But unlike some recent seasons, the path through the SEC is both intriguing and unpredictable, setting up a campaign that could define the next phase of Georgia's dominance.

Georgia is coming off another elite season, continuing a run that has included multiple playoff appearances and SEC titles over the past several years. The expectations in Athens haven't changed — Georgia has a program built to compete for championships every year. However, roster turnover and a demanding schedule create just enough uncertainty to make 2026 compelling.

The offense is expected to be led by redshirt senior quarterback Gunner Stockton, who has already shown flashes of high-level play. Around him, Georgia will rely on a new wave of playmakers stepping into larger roles, a common theme for a program that reloads rather than rebuilds. On defense, players like Raylen Wilson and KJ Bolden headline a unit that should once again rank among the nation's best.

If Georgia is going to reach its ceiling, it will likely be because of that defense — a group that has consistently carried the Bulldogs through high-stakes SEC matchups.

Georgia's 2026 schedule is a mix of manageable non-conference games and a brutal SEC slate. The Bulldogs open with home games against Tennessee State and Western Kentucky, which should serve as early tune-ups. Conference play, however, ramps up quickly.

At home, Georgia hosts Oklahoma, Auburn, Missouri and Vanderbilt, along with the annual rivalry game against Florida, this year at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta.

These games provide opportunities to build momentum, especially with Sanford Stadium expected to be one of the toughest environments in the country.

The real tests come on the road. Georgia will travel to Arkansas, South Carolina, Ole Miss and Alabama — arguably one of the most difficult road slates in college football. Notably, Smart has yet to win at Alabama or Ole Miss, adding extra narrative and weight to those matchups.

This is the marquee game of the season. Any time Georgia and Alabama meet, it carries SEC Championship and College Football Playoff implications. Winning at Bryant-Denny Stadium would not only boost Georgia's resume but also eliminate a major hurdle that has lingered during the Smart era.

Ole Miss has emerged as a legitimate SEC contender, and Georgia's recent battles with the Rebels have been high-scoring and intense, especially after the ending of the College Football Playoff Quarterfinal game, where the teams duked it out. This road game could swing the SEC race, especially if both teams enter with playoff hopes intact.

A newer SEC matchup that brings a formidable and intriguing game for the Bulldogs. Oklahoma's arrival into the conference adds another high-profile opponent, and this game could serve as a measuring stick for both programs. The Bulldogs defeated the Sooners 54-48 in their last meeting, the 2018 Rose Bowl.

The rivalry with Florida football remains one of the defining games on Georgia's schedule every year, regardless of rankings or location. This year's game will be played at a neutral

site in Atlanta instead of Jacksonville, Florida, splitting fans and creating a postseason-like environment.

The in-state rivalry against Georgia Tech always carries emotional weight, regardless of records. Clean, Old-Fashioned Hate isn't just tradition — it's pride. Georgia will be expected to win, but rivalry games have a way of tightening margins and creating chaos late in the season.

This is one of the most dangerous games on the schedule. South Carolina's Williams-Brice Stadium is one of the toughest environments in the SEC, and the Gamecocks have a history of giving Georgia problems when given the opportunity to host. If the Bulldogs aren't sharp, this is a classic upset spot that could derail their bigger goals.

The 2026 season won't be easy, but that's what makes it compelling. Georgia has the roster, coaching and culture to compete for everything again. The difference between a good season and a championship run will come down to a handful of road games — and whether the Bulldogs can once again rise to meet the moment.

While Georgia will not have to face some scary SEC opponents such as Texas, Texas A&M and LSU in 2026, there are still speculations that the tests on Georgia's schedule are enough to prevent it from reaching its goals.

Losses could come from the brutal road slate, with Ole Miss standing out as the most likely opponent to hand Georgia its lone defeat in 2026. However, Georgia should still position itself for an SEC Championship berth and another College Football Playoff run.

Prediction: 11-1 (8-1 SEC)



Georgia quarterback Gunner Stockton (14) runs with the ball during a game against Georgia Tech at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, Georgia, on Friday, Nov. 28, 2025. PHOTO/KATHERINE DAVIS

Seeking success

Gunner Stockton headlines QB room again

By Ryan Erdossy

With bright, young stars dominating SEC quarterback headlines this offseason, last year's MVP of the conference title game is hardly mentioned as one of the best in the conference.

That's despite a 2025 season that put Gunner Stockton among the nation's most productive quarterbacks. He finished seventh in Heisman Trophy voting and led Georgia to a 11-1 regular season record against one of the country's toughest schedules. As the Bulldogs enter 2026 with playoff expectations once again, the quiet around Stockton doesn't match what he produced on the field.

If anything, Stockton's first season as a starter was defined by moments that demanded him to rise to the occasion — and he showed guts.

Big-game poise

September 13, 2025

Final | Georgia 44 Tennessee 41 OT

Stockton's first road game as a starter did not disappoint. Questions lingered around the quarterback, but by responding against a ranked opponent in an intimidating environment, the question marks seemed to be answered when Georgia needed it most.

Trailing by eight with under three minutes remaining, Georgia faced a fourth-and-6 from the Tennessee 28-yard line. Stockton delivered a strike to the outside shoulder of London Humphreys for a touchdown, keeping the Bulldogs alive. After converting the two-point attempt and forcing overtime, Georgia completed the comeback.

Stockton finished with 304 total yards and three touchdowns, but more importantly showed command in a hostile environment early in SEC play. After trailing five times, including in overtime, the comeback win provided a sigh of relief for Bulldogs fans. A schedule that gave little margin for error loomed for a team with playoff hopes. Head coach Kirby Smart said it best after the game — Stockton "grew up" that night.

A dual-threat presence

October 11, 2025

Final | Georgia 20 Auburn 10

Towards the middle of the season, offensive coordinator Mike Bobo seemed to find Stockton's secret weapon: his legs.

Bobo consistently focuses on pounding the rock; Georgia averaged approximately 41 rushing attempts per game last season. A balanced attack on the ground and through the air becomes much easier when a defense has to account for a quarterback run as well.

Against Auburn, Stockton found a way to win when a defense allows him to utilize his dual-threat abilities. He led the Bulldogs in rushing, consistently extending drives and converting a crucial 10-yard touchdown on the ground to cap off the low-scoring victory.

The ability to create on the ground became a defining part of his game as the season progressed.

Commanding the moment

October 18, 2026

Final | Georgia 43 Ole Miss 35

When Georgia faced then-No. 5 Ole Miss, the offensive firepower favored the Rebels. A tightly matched, high-scoring game was expected, leaving Stockton to once again answer a question. Could Georgia outscore and match Ole Miss' lethal offensive attack?

Stockton and the offense answered with an exclamation point, scoring on all of their possessions excluding kneels. Georgia dictated the pace, controlling the time of possession and outgaining Ole Miss 510 to 351 total yards.

The win did not come from lack of scoring from the Rebels, but Stockton and the Bulldogs were able to respond. Stockton accounted for five touchdowns, four passing and one rushing. He accumulated 348 total yards and led a 17-0 fourth-quarter comeback.

A crucial score once again came from Stockton's legs. On second-and-8 in the second quarter, Stockton faked a hand off and rushed forward for 22 yards to score a touchdown. The previous plays in that drive consisted of big runs from Chauncey Bowens, opening up an opportunity for Stockton to run.

His decision making in those key moments, led to not just managing the game, but commanding it.

Tested under pressure

November 28, 2025

Final | Georgia 16 Georgia Tech 9

The last game of the regular season followed a different script for Stockton. In a defensive battle against Georgia Tech, he put up his most uneven performance of the season, struggling to find rhythm through the air.

Stockton threw an interception on the opening drive of the rivalry game and never seemed to fully settle in. For much of the afternoon, the timing and accuracy that defined his stronger outings was absent.

But Georgia did not need him to carry the offense.

The Bulldogs established the run early, picking up 190 yards on the ground. The defense suffocated the then-No. 23 Yellow Jackets' offense, holding them to a season-low nine points.

Georgia found a way to win, and Stockton's mental toughness was tested. In his previous four games with an interception, he still finished with over 190 passing yards. Those games underscore the short memory required at quarterback. Managing mistakes and preventing one play from snowballing is part of the position.

As Stockton enters his second year as a starter, games like this will shape how he responds.

SEC Championship

Stockton responded to his uneven outing against Georgia Tech with one of his most efficient performances of the season on the biggest stage. He went 20-for-26 with three touchdown passes and earned MVP honors as Georgia secured another SEC title.

Depth at the position

The annual G-Day scrimmage offered a glimpse into Georgia's quarterback depth beyond Stockton. Attention has largely centered on redshirt sophomore Ryan Puglisi, viewed as the next in line in a system that has consistently rewarded quarterbacks who develop and wait their turn.

The surprise of the day, however, came from redshirt freshman Hezekiah Millender who threw for over 100 yards and found the end zone on a rushing touchdown. The quarterback

room also includes Bryson Beaver, who initially enrolled at Oregon before transferring to Georgia, along with freshman Ryan Montgomery, adding another young arm to a developing group behind Stockton. Down the road, Georgia also has a verbal commitment from Jayden Wade, the No. 1 quarterback in the 2028 class.

Looking forward to 2026

Stockton's 2025 season was defined by firsts and how he responded to them, showing poise and toughness in key moments. He's not just putting up numbers in a great system — he showed he can deliver when the system alone wasn't enough.

For Georgia fans, though, the final memory of the season is still a sour one: a playoff loss in the Sugar Bowl.

The defeat reflected both the strengths and limitations of Stockton's game. Throughout the season, he consistently welcomed contact, standing tall in collapsing pockets and delivering throws knowing a hit was coming. That toughness became one of the defining traits of his first season as Georgia's starter.

But as Stockton enters his second full season at the helm, growth may come in learning when to avoid those hits. With Nate Frazier and Bowens returning in the backfield, Georgia is expected to maintain a run-heavy approach. Within that structure, Stockton's development will center on decision making: when to extend plays with his legs, when to take what the defense gives him and when to push the ball downfield.

The final piece may define Georgia's ceiling in 2026. The Bulldogs were often criticized for their inability to consistently create explosive plays through the air. With Zachariah Branch, Colbie Young and Dillon Bell moving on to the NFL, Stockton will lead a reshaped receiver room featuring returning targets Lawson Luckie and London Humphreys alongside a younger group looking to emerge.

Stockton's first season as Georgia's starter established what he could be. His second season may determine how far the Bulldogs can go. And if the progression continues, the conversation surrounding the SEC's star quarterbacks may not be able to leave him out much longer.



Georgia quarterback Bryson Beaver (18) runs with the ball during the second half of the annual G-Day spring football game at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, April 18, 2026. PHOTO/LILY PERELLA

Gameday flavors

Tailgating food traditions

Aisha Ahmed

As gameday approaches, the Classic City gears up for another season of Saturdays between the hedges. Whether you are tailgating in the lawns and parking lots around Sanford Stadium or hosting a watch party at home, anyone can enjoy some of these Southern drinks and snacks perfect for your UGA gameday.

Drinks

GEORGIA PEACH LEMONADE

This fruity refreshing drink is a nod to the state's most famous crop and is a hit at any tailgate. It is simple to make with fresh lemonade and peach puree or nectar. Top it all off with a few mint leaves as a nice garnish, and you've got a drink that is the life of the party.

SWEET TEA PUNCH

A dressed-up twist on the Southern staple, this punch combines sweet tea with a splash of lemonade and fruit juice. It's easy to make in a big batch, so it's perfect for serving a crowd between the hedges.

APPLE CIDER FLOAT

Perfect for cooler gameday temperatures, this drink combines warm or chilled apple cider with a scoop of vanilla ice cream. It's an easy way to add a festive, fall touch to your spread.

Shareables

PIMENTO CHEESE DIP

This classic Southern spread is creamy, tangy and endlessly versatile. Serve it with crackers, celery sticks or toasted baguette slices, and consider adding a dash of hot sauce or diced jalapeños for that extra kick.

BOILED PEANUTS

It's not a Georgia tailgate if there aren't boiled peanuts. This-Southern tailgate staple is simple to prepare. Place peanuts in a big pot with salt and boiling water—some also like to add Cajun seasoning for extra flavor. They're easy to keep warm in a slow cooker throughout the game.

CORN DOGS

These handheld classics are easy for guests to grab and eat while mingling. Make them mini-sized for easy portions, and serve with a variety of dips like ketchup, mustard or honey mustard.

Main attractions

CLASSIC HOT DOGS

A true gameday cannot be complete without hot dogs on the grill. They're quick to cook, easy to hold in one hand while cheering on the Georgia Bulldogs and endlessly customizable with toppings like chili, coleslaw or diced onions.

CHEESEBURGER SLIDERS

These mini burgers are a fan favorite because they're easy to make in bulk and simple for guests to grab in between plays. Place cheddar cheese, pickles or even caramelized onions in between a pack of Hawaiian rolls, and watch your crowd go wild.

SMOKED SAUSAGE SKEWERS

Threading sliced smoked sausage onto skewers with bell peppers and onions makes for an easy, mess-free main that cooks quickly on the grill. Serve with a side of mustard or barbecue sauce for dipping.



A Georgia fan grills at a tailgate during the SEC Championship game between Georgia and Alabama at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, Georgia, on Saturday, Dec. 6, 2025. PHOTO/KATHERINE DAVIS

PULLED-PORK SANDWICHES

This southern barbecue dish is perfect for feeding a crowd, since the pork can be smoked or slow cooked well ahead of time and kept warm till kickoff. Serve it on soft burger buns with coleslaw and a drizzle of barbecue or hot sauce.

Desserts

PEACH COBBLER BITES

These mini versions of the Southern classic are easy to serve without plates or forks. Bake in a muffin tin using fresh or canned peaches, and top with a scoop of vanilla ice cream if you're serving right away.

CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIE BARS

A crowd-pleasing dessert that's easier to prepare in bulk than individual cookies. Cut them into squares once cooled, and consider adding pecans for a Southern twist.

BANANA PUDDING CUPS

This layered dessert of vanilla wafers, banana slices, and pudding is a beloved Georgia favorite. Serving it in individual cups makes it mess-free and easy to hand out at a tailgate.

Seasonal recommendations

HOT WEATHER

Fresh cut fruit: Watermelon, pineapple and berries make for a refreshing snack, and popsicles stored in a cooler are an easy way to help everyone cool down between plays.

COLD WEATHER

Hot chocolate: As the season rolls into late fall, temperatures in and around Athens can dip, calling for warmer comfort foods. A mug of hot chocolate is a must have for those chilly kickoffs.

A photograph of a modern bedroom interior. A large bed with a white quilted blanket and several pillows is the central focus. On the wall above the bed are three framed purple feathers and a mounted bull head. A window with white curtains is on the right. The overall aesthetic is clean and contemporary.

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A photograph of a brown paper shopping bag from Kroger. The bag is overflowing with various groceries, including a carton of Simply Classic Trail Mix, a bag of Tender Spinach, a carton of orange juice, a container of blueberries, a container of strawberries, and an avocado. The background is a solid blue color.

News



GRAPHIC/CAROLINE NEWBERN

Gameday for dummies

The ultimate University of Georgia gameday survival guide

Sophia Eppley

A sea of red and black, echoes of “Who’s that coming down the track?” and the steady vibration of music from tailgate speakers. This is gameday at the University of Georgia. Streets are packed, grills are fired up before sunrise and the air buzzes with energy as more than 90,000 fans swarm toward Sanford Stadium.

Whether you’re a first-year student or a seasoned senior, surviving gameday takes more than just team spirit; it takes planning, patience and the right gear. Here’s everything you need to know to make the most of your UGA gameday.

Park it like it’s hot

For on-campus parking, UGA Transportation and Parking Services offers season parking passes, purchased on a first-come, first-serve basis through ParkMobile. Seasonal passes are \$280 for the Carlton Street Deck, East Campus Deck, River Road and the Health/Visitors Center, and E23 Park & Ride is \$1,050 — meant for RV parking. More information can be found on the UGA TPS website.

Parking on sidewalks, grass or landscaped areas is prohibited. Illegally parked vehicles are subject to being towed at the owner’s expense. Gameday parking areas open at 7 a.m. on Saturdays and overflow parking is available at the Intramural Fields.

Fan shuttles from the East Deck on River Road will start running 3.5 hours before kickoff. Shuttles from behind the Intramural Fields will begin running once overflow parking opens. There are many lots to park within walking distance from the stadium; the full list can be found on the University of Georgia Athletics website.

Off-campus parking is offered at The Classic Center and numerous places in downtown Athens. The Classic Center, located at 300 N. Thomas St., offers two season parking packages — which come with either single or double spaces — as well as single-game passes. Downtown Athens decks and lots also offer season parking passes for \$350. Local businesses, organizations and homeowners may also rent out parking spaces.

Perfect the pre-game

There are plenty of places to tailgate on campus, including the East Campus parking lots, Myers Quad, North Campus lawns and lots, the Tate Student Center and the Bulldogs Tailgate Club in Reed Quad, which offers customizable tailgate packages with varying catering and tent options — all within earshot of Sanford Stadium.

For tailgating on campus, set up cannot start until 7 a.m. on Saturdays. Only charcoal grills are allowed and tailgaters must bring their own power source. Folding chairs are acceptable but large furniture is prohibited. For those tailgating on North Campus, tailgating can begin only five hours before kickoff, folding tables must be no longer than six feet, and kegs, generators, TVs, grills, cookers and amplified music are not allowed. For a family-friendly experience, Campus View Church at 1360 S. Lumpkin St. offers an alcohol-free lot with a playground and restrooms.

Once you’ve secured your spot, settle in and attack the day. Bring games like cornhole or a deck of cards to pass the time, set up a portable speaker and play your favorite songs or munch on burgers, dips and desserts while preparing to cheer on the dawgs.

Don’t forget the essentials

Sanford Stadium permits clear bags smaller than 12”x12” or small clutch purses. A full list of prohibited items can be found on the University of Georgia Athletics website under stadium policies and procedures.

First things first, make sure to have your game tickets, a form of ID and parking passes with you at all times. Inside of your clear bag, you should have:

A hat and sunscreen, protect yourself from the sun and summer heat.

Water; one unopened bottle is permitted and hydration stations can be found once in the stadium.

Cashless payment methods, for drinks and food, Sanford Stadium is a cashless venue.

Portable charger, make sure your phone is always charged for digital tickets, photos and communication.

Beat the clock, beat the crowds

Now that you’ve found parking, tailgated and packed your essentials, you should be ready to go ... right?

Not quite. Getting to the stadium is half the battle.

To avoid stampedes of Georgia fans rushing through the gates at the last minute or being stuck in the nosebleeds, plan to arrive even before stadium gates open. Gates open two hours before kickoff, but to get a good seat in the student section, arrive even earlier to secure a spot in line — especially for big games. For smaller games, arriving an hour early should suffice.

For regular ticket holders, still plan to arrive two hours and 15 minutes prior to kickoff to experience the Dawg Walk and other pre-game traditions.



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Georgia football position group outlook

What to know entering 2026

Layla Nicholson

Quarterback

Gunner Stockton enters the fall season as the established veteran leader and projected starting quarterback for Georgia. Both Stockton and redshirt sophomore Ryan Puglisi saw first-team opportunities during G-Day. Stockton brings more experience to the field, while Puglisi offers backup potential as a former four-star recruit with strong arm talent. Ryan Montgomery also adds depth to the room as he begins developing his skill within offensive coordinator Mike Bobo's system, alongside freshman Bryson Beaver. Beaver, who joined the program from Oregon, has shown early flashes this spring and will continue to develop within the quarterback room. With Stockton appearing to be firmly positioned as the starter, Georgia's success at quarterback will hinge on his performance and ability to lead a reshaped offense.

Running back

Georgia's running back room remains one of the deepest units on the roster heading into the 2026 season. The Bulldogs' top two rushers last season were Nate Frazier and Chauncey Bowens, both of whom are returning and should again carry much of Georgia's rushing workload. Frazier emerged as a key contributor last year and is positioned to take on an even larger workload, bringing leadership to the running back room. Bowens also emerged as a reliable short-yardage option late last season. Kentucky transfer Dante Dowdell and Dwight Phillips Jr. further strengthen the group, offering depth in both size and speed. Rounding out the group is Bo Walker, who provides additional depth and experience. Georgia has consistently relied on multiple backs under head coach Kirby Smart, and that approach is likely to continue.

Wide receiver

The Bulldogs hope to rely on roughly six wide receivers this fall, with roles continuing to take shape following spring practice. London Humphreys and Isiah Canion are expected to lead the group once recovered from minor injuries but will enter the season as the group's most experienced returning receivers. Behind them, CJ Wiley, Sacovie White-Helton and Talyn Taylor will be key pieces and likely take on a larger role as the season approaches. One of the more notable developments from the spring came from sophomore Landon Roldan, who emerged across all 15 practices and could factor into the rotation early. Georgia will continue to rely on depth and rotation as the wide receiver unit looks to stay sharp in the passing game and become a more dependable group for Stockton.

Tight end

Georgia's tight end room may be one of the team's deepest position groups this year. Lawson Luckie will likely be the group's leader and is positioned to be a central piece of the offense, even after limited play in the spring game. However, sophomore Elyiss Williams showed flashes of his ability as a freshman, indicating he may challenge Luckie for a role in the passing game. Redshirt sophomore Jaden Reddell has also gotten plenty of hype this spring, being one of the more explosive players in the unit. Reddell finished with 38 receiving yards and a touchdown at G-Day. With multiple capable options, Georgia has the ability to lean into two-tight-end sets, using the group both to support the run game and stay involved in the passing game.

Offensive line

The offensive line at Georgia will be defined by health, development and depth. Senior Earnest Greene III anchors

the left tackle spot when available, while Drew Bobo returns at center after dealing with a foot injury late in 2025. If both are healthy, Georgia has the potential to field one of the SEC's stronger front fives. Dontrell Glover has seemed to settle in at left guard after an encouraging first season in Athens, while Juan Gaston has taken first-team reps at right tackle and continues to trend upward. Zykie Helton also works into the mix at right guard. With additional depth developing, the Bulldogs will hope to be able to rotate multiple linemen without losing consistency up front as they navigate how all of the pieces will fit together this year.

Defensive line

Headlining the defensive line in 2026 is sophomore Elijah Griffin. Griffin had a strong finish to last season and projects as one of the premier interior defenders in the country with further development. Jordan Hall and Xzavier McLeod give Georgia some experienced options along the interior, while Gabe Harris anchors the edge group as one of the more established veterans on the roster. Behind them, players such as Amaris Williams and Joseph Jonah-Ajonye add depth, with younger contributors continuing to push for snaps. With the ability to move players around on the front this season, Georgia believes that this group has the potential to be one of its strongest defensive lines in recent years.

Linebacker

Georgia lost several experienced contributors from last year's defense, but the linebacker room is still showing impressive depth going into the 2026 season. Senior Raylen Wilson and junior Chris Cole are expected to take the lead as experienced veterans. Justin Williams is expected to take on a large part of the workload left by CJ Allen. Zayden Walker also remains a player to watch after flashing potential in key moments last season. On the outside, Quintavius Johnson finished the 2025 season strongly and returns as one of Georgia's more experienced pass-rushing options. The development of younger linebackers such as Isaiah Gibson, Chase Linton and Darren Ikinagbon could be important for a Georgia pass rush looking to improve this fall.

Defensive back

The defensive back group is stacked with a combination of returning production, transfer additions and young talent competing for snaps. Ellis Robinson IV leads the cornerback group after emerging as one of Georgia's top defenders late last season, helping ease the loss of Daylen Everette. Demello Jones and transfer Gentry Williams are also expected to factor heavily into the rotation at cornerback. At safety, KJ Bolden returns as a standout leader, while Clemson transfer and Athens native Khalil Barnes will likely start across from him. Kyron Jones, Rasean Dinkins and transfer Ja'Marley Riddle add experience to the unit. With several younger defensive backs continuing to develop, the Bulldogs again appear deep in the secondary heading into the fall.

Special teams

Special teams has always been a priority for Smart, and that will not change entering the 2026 season. Senior kicker Peyton Woodring anchors the group, having been one of the most reliable kickers in the country throughout his career, while an inexperienced Drew Miller is expected to take over as the starting punter. The Bulldogs must also replace return specialist Zachariah Branch this year, likely by having White-Helton take on a larger special teams role. Although Georgia has experience stepping into those spots, replacing the consistency of Thorson at punter and Branch will remain an important storyline to look out for throughout the season.



Georgia quarterback Ryan Puglisi (12) stands in the backfield during a game against Marshall University at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Aug. 30, 2025. PHOTO/KALEB TATUM

NUMBERS TO KNOW 2026 season preview

Evan Waldman

#1 Talyn Taylor

Talyn Taylor signed with Georgia as a 5-star recruit in the 2025 recruiting class but did not have the freshman season he would've liked, as much of it was ruined due to a collarbone injury he suffered in early October. Despite that, Taylor will step into a much larger role following key departures at the wide receiver positions to players such as Zachariah Branch, Noah Thomas, Colbie Young and Dillon Bell. The redshirt freshman will be counted on to stretch defenses vertically and create separation in key situations, and if he can translate his potential into consistent production, Taylor could quickly emerge as a reliable target for quarterback Gunner Stockton.

Nate Frazier

Nate Frazier, a running back from Compton, California, enters the fall as the leader in the Georgia backfield. Last season, the junior compiled 947 rushing yards and seven total touchdowns, earning All-SEC Third Team honors. Frazier has the ability to accelerate through gaps and create yards after contact, which was on display against Mississippi State last season when Frazier rushed for 181 yards, with a long of 59 yards and a touchdown. With the Bulldogs traditionally relying on physicality and a balanced rushing attack, Frazier's production, alongside redshirt sophomore Chauncey Bowens, could provide Georgia's offense with a dynamic one-two punch in the backfield.

#7 Lawson Luckie

The junior from Norcross, Georgia, has more than 500 yards receiving over the past two seasons in a supporting role, but Luckie will likely see an increase in usage after Oscar Delp's departure to the NFL. Luckie will be asked to be both a safety blanket and playmaker for Stockton in his second season as a starter. The Bulldogs are expected to have numerous highly talented players such as Elyiss Williams, Ethan Barbour, Kaiden Prothro and Jaden Reddell assume larger roles, and with Luckie's leadership, those players could become even more impactful for Georgia in the fall.

#1 Ellis Robinson IV

Ellis Robinson IV enters the 2026 fall as one of Georgia's most talented defensive backs. After appearing in all 14 games last season and making 12 starts, the redshirt sophomore from New Haven, Connecticut, recorded 20 tackles along with four interceptions, tied for first among SEC defenders. These stats earned Robinson FWAA Freshman Defensive Player of the Year and 2025 Second Team All-SEC honors. With phenomenal ball skills and length, Robinson has the tools to develop into Georgia's next lockdown corner as he will be tasked with matching up against some of the top receivers in the SEC. Robinson's ability to create turnovers and limit explosive plays could be a defining factor for Georgia's defense this season.

#5 Raylen Wilson

Wilson, a senior linebacker, returns to Athens as the most experienced defensive player for the Bulldogs. After being named to the 2023 SEC All-Freshman Team and appearing in every game in 2024, Wilson had a strong junior year in 2025, starting all 14 games, tallying 74 tackles, 30 solo tackles, 6.5 tackles for loss and 2.5 sacks. Wilson's skillset is known for his elite closing speed, sideline-to-sideline range and high-volume tackling. With linebacker C.J. Allen being drafted into the NFL, Wilson will be tasked with leading the Georgia defense as a vocal leader and as a playmaker.

Elijah Griffin

Second-year defensive lineman Elijah Griffin, enters the fall as one of the most physically talented players on Georgia's roster. Standing at 6-foot-4 and 310 pounds, Griffin has a rare combination of size, strength and athleticism that makes him a disruptive force along the defensive front, a place where Georgia looks to dominate every year. As a freshman, Griffin earned a spot on the 2025 Coaches Freshman All-SEC Team as he appeared in all 14 games, posting 22 tackles, 14 solo tackles, 2.5 tackles for loss, a forced fumble and a sack. As Georgia continues its traditional rotation of defensive linemen, Griffin is expected to take on a larger role in his second season as the sophomore's development could be a major factor in the defense's success.

#90

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CORRECTIONS

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 soon as possible. In the Aug. 6 edition, on page B2, it was misstated that Dexter Fisher is already serving as mayor; his start date is in January 2027 while Kelly Girtz finishes his final term, and on A7, the wrong date and credit was used in a photo caption. The Red & Black regrets these errors and they have since been fixed. 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.

Who let the Dawgs out?

Uga throughout the years

Ansley Jackson

The Seiler family has raised generations of the University of Georgia’s beloved mascot, Uga. This bulldog has quite the history, with 10 bulldogs barking before the current dog, Boom. Here is a brief history of all the mascots that have represented the school.

Uga 0: Before the Seiler Family

During the team’s first football season, the mascot was not a bulldog at all, but a goat. The goat made its debut during the Georgia versus Auburn game on Feb. 22, 1892, wearing a black coat with ‘U.G’ in red letters on either side, a hat and ribbons on its horns.

Trilby, a female bull terrier owned by student Charles H. Black, was the first dog mascot for the team. Trilby, along with her 13 puppies, were considered the first sponsors for Southern football, and inspired the “Bulldog” label that Georgia wears to this day.

Mr. Angel was the final predecessor for Uga. From 1944-1946, he was the first English Bulldog to serve as the UGA mascot.

Uga I, Hood’s Ole Dan: 1956-1966

Hood’s Ole Dan, the first Uga, was a gift to Cecelia Seiler from a friend, Frank Heard. He made his first appearance during the 1956 home opener against Florida State University. One of Frank Seiler’s classmates in law school, William Young, came up with Uga’s name, which is an abbreviation for the University of Georgia.

Uga II, Ole Dan’s Uga: 1966-1972

Uga II, the son of Uga I, was introduced during the Homecoming pregame ceremony against Kentucky in 1966. He had a grand entrance, with Charles Seiler leading him down a field lined by the Georgia Redcoat Band.

Ole Dan’s Uga had a successful career, watching the team appear in five different bowl games and win two SEC Championships.

Uga III, Seiler’s Uga Three: 1972-1980

Seiler’s Uga Three had a successful career, leading the team to six bowl games and winning the 1980 NCAA championship. He ended his career on his 100th game, marking the start of the 1981 season.

Uga IV, Seiler’s Uga Four: 1981-1989

Seiler’s Uga Four was considered the most active of the Georgia mascots, being the only mascot to attend a bowl game every year of his career. He also attended the Heisman Trophy Banquet with Herschel Walker on Dec. 9, 1982, becoming the first mascot to be invited to a Heisman Trophy Banquet.

After being named “Dog of the Decade” by Vince Dooley, he was awarded the Georgia varsity letter, which is the highest honor available to UGA mascots.



Georgia’s mascot Uga XI, also known as Boom, walks the sidelines during the first half of a game against Texas at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Nov. 15, 2025. PHOTO/ZACH LEGGIO

Uga V, Uga IV’s Magillicuddy II: 1990-1999

Uga IV’s Magillicuddy II led Georgia to four NCAA team titles, women’s swimming and diving, women’s gymnastics, men’s tennis and men’s golf, and placed second in the Director’s Cup race. This is considered Georgia’s most successful collective sporting effort in department history at the time.

Uga V was featured on the cover of Sports Illustrated, where he was declared the nation’s best college mascot.

In addition to being a team mascot, he also pursued an acting career, appearing on Clint Eastwood’s “Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil,” which was filmed in his hometown of Savannah, Georgia.

Uga VI, Uga V’s Whatchagot Loran: 1999-2008

Uga V’s Whatchagot Loran was crowned the winningest mascot in UGA history in 2007, with a record of 87-27. Over the span of his career, he attended 114 games, which is more than any Uga in the mascot’s history.

Uga VI is also known as being the heaviest Uga, weighing 65 pounds, which is 20 pounds heavier than his father, Uga V.

Uga VII, Loran’s Best: 2008-2009

Loran’s Best was introduced during the 2008 season-opener against Georgia Southern. He was known as a laidback mascot, who was not annoyed by flying in airplanes, taking photos with fans or the loud crowds during games.

Uga VII unexpectedly passed away on Nov. 19, 2009, due to heart problems. Georgia did not have a live mascot at the final home game of the 2009 season. Instead, a wreath was placed above Uga VII’s dog house, and the players wore a special decal on their helmets in his honor.

Uga VIII, Big Bad Bruce: 2010-2011

Big Bad Bruce was introduced during the Homecoming pregame ceremony against Vanderbilt on Oct. 16, 2010.

Uga VIII was diagnosed with lymphoma and was only able to serve the last six regular season games in the 2010 season. Due to his condition, he had to miss the bowl game against the University of Central Florida.

Uga IX, Russ: 2012-2015

Russ, the half brother of Uga VII, got an upgrade from interim mascot in 2012. During his reign, he won the SEC Eastern Division Championship twice. He was the first substitute mascot since Otto in 1986.

Uga X, Que: 2015-2022

Que made his debut during the game against Georgia Southern on Nov. 21, 2015. He attended every game in 2015 as part of his audition for the Uga title.

Uga X took the crown for winningest Uga, surpassing Uga VI’s 87-27 record. He had a record of 91-18 and won back-to-back national championships, as well as two SEC championships.

Uga XI, Boom: 2023-present

Boom stepped into his role as Uga at only 10 months old. He was introduced during the G-Day Game in 2023.

Uga XI has already had a successful career, leading the team to back-to-back SEC championships, and has a record of 36-6. With a few more years, Boom might claim the title of winningest dog.



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 - 9. Boxing maneuver
 - 12. Cut down to size
 - 13. Antler’s point
 - 14. Flamenco shout
 - 15. Divorce alternative
 - 17. Outfield surface
 - 18. Business orgs.
 - 19. Smooths
 - 21. Fizzle, with “out”
 - 24. House adjunct
 - 26. Poetic paeon
 - 27. Card game start
 - 29. Small amounts
 - 33. Grazing ground
 - 34. Gratifies
 - 36. Break
 - 37. Nothing but
 - 39. Doctor’s directive
 - 40. Age of Aquarius, for one
 - 41. Needs treatment
 - 43. European viper
 - 45. Extinguishes
 - 48. Kind of flour
 - 49. Half and half
 - 50. Highflying industry
 - 56. Dawn discovery
 - 57. During
- DOWN**

 - 58. Australian export
 - 59. Mouse catcher
 - 60. Die
 - 61. Duration of office
- 42. Biblical patriarch
 - 44. Stop
 - 45. Extinction exemplar
 - 46. Again, in different form
 - 47. Whimper
 - 48. Was a passenger
 - 51. Flightless bird
 - 52. Barbecue offering
 - 53. Make like
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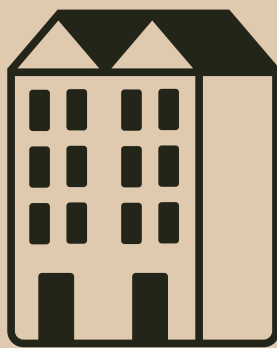
Highlights from Georgia football's 2025-2026 season



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STUDENT VOICES

UGA students share their favorite gameday traditions and tips

Ethan Greene

For several Saturdays each fall semester, Athens’ population increases from 120,000 to more than 200,000. The reason? The Georgia Bulldogs are playing. Whether it’s a noon kickoff or a night game, there’s something for everyone on a Saturday in Athens.

The Red & Black asked UGA students to share their favorite Georgia gameday traditions, spots and advice.



ANDREW ELKO | SOPHOMORE FINANCE AND SPORT MANAGEMENT MAJOR

“I like the end zone student section – that’s my favorite. I feel like that’s the best view and everyone’s always hype in there,” Elko said. “If I can be right in the middle of the section near the top, I’ll probably have the best view... [During] the onside kick against Texas, I was in that section, and everyone was just going crazy.”



MICAH JONES | SENIOR CHEMISTRY MAJOR

“I haven’t been to that many games, but I just like getting there super early with everybody, and getting pumped up,” Jones said. “Three hours [early], depending on the game. If [Georgia] is playing like a nobody, maybe two [hours]. But, if it’s an SEC game, probably three or four hours. It doesn’t take much [to stay entertained]; there are so many people, so much energy.”

CAMERON TAGLIAFERI | MASTER’S STUDENT IN THERAPEAUTICS DISCOVERY

“My freshman year, when we didn’t have tickets or we didn’t want to go, we’d watch it from the dorms because we had a TV there. Some of my friends and I have watched games downtown before. We watched it this year at our house because we rented a place; we had a huge area to tailgate in, so I don’t think it’s necessarily one spot that makes or breaks it. I think it’s more about the people you’re around, the experience you make of it.”



EMA CHERAISI | JUNIOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY SCIENCES MAJOR

“I just like getting together with my friends early in the morning and getting ready together. I pick out my outfits the fall before – the year of the game. I have this app that lets me match them up. Then, you can just click on the picture of the piece, go straight to the website and buy it on your own time. That’s how I pick my outfits; I like them to be intentional.”



ROYAL ADEGUNLOYE | JUNIOR COMPUTER ENGINEERING MAJOR

“Going downtown and just exploring Athens in general,” Adegunloye said. “When it’s just classes, it’s more of a chiller vibe, but when you go downtown – and it’s game day – and everybody’s just all about the Bulldogs... It’s just exciting; everybody’s super friendly; everybody’s just super sociable; it’s just real. I don’t know how to describe it.”





Georgia fans dressed in UGA colors head to the Dawg Walk for the UGA vs. Alabama game at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Sept. 27, 2025. PHOTO/ASHTIN BARKER

‘We dress up to the nines’

Georgia football gameday fashion

By Alexia Rule

When University of Georgia freshmen first walk into Sanford Stadium as students, they are met with an unparalleled atmosphere born of SEC culture and Georgia’s roots.

As they look around at the more than 90,000 fans in the stands, they are met with booming voices supporting the team, smells of classic gameday foods in the air and an impossible-to-miss sea of red and black. Fashion is a key aspect of SEC gamedays that sets the University of Georgia apart.

SEC gameday fashion has seen trends rise and fall over the decades, from the elegance of the 1950s to the colorful looks of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, the grunge of the 1990s to the ever-evolving style of the 2000s.

Today, matching sets, skirts, dresses, jeans, sneakers and boots, face paint, big jewelry, T-shirts, sports jerseys and more all have a place in Sanford Stadium, sharing one common theme: the Bulldogs.

Students, faculty, alumni and other visiting fans alike start gameday long before kickoff, with the morning spent getting ready and dressing to the nines in support of the Bulldogs. From patterns and colors to classic pieces and bold choices, fashion trends have become a defining feature of gameday culture over the years.

Haley Pearson, a senior advertising major with a minor in fashion merchandising, compared gameday fashion to the Met Gala, where interesting outfits stand out and inspire the others to make bold fashion choices.

“Gameday is one of the only times where it’s incredibly socially acceptable by everyone to dress super out there,” Pearson said.

Pearson recalls always being “very expressive” with her fashion choices growing up. During her sophomore and junior years, she served as the creative director of Rouge Magazine, a student-run fashion publication affiliated with the UGA College of Family and Consumer Sciences.

Pearson noted that modern gameday fashion is “very diverse” with many options, including “zebra, polka dots, bright reds and black and white stripes.” Pearson added that sparkles are not just acceptable on gamedays, but fashionable as well.

Shopping for Saturdays

When shopping for Saturdays in Sanford Stadium, Pearson looks to the Urban Outfitters sale room, Pitaya in downtown Athens and online retailer Princess Polly.

Dress Up Athens is a women’s clothing store in downtown Athens where Kara Worley has been a manager for five years. She has watched denim dresses, shorts, skirts and vests remain stable pieces across football seasons, calling them “good layering pieces [that] always stay.” White and red clothing also remains popular.

“Gameday is one of the only times where it’s incredibly socially acceptable by everyone to dress super out there.”

HALEY PEARSON | SENIOR ADVERTISING MAJOR

“Based on what people are buying in here, it’s just dressing up to a whole different level going to the games,” Worley said. “The style is just completely like night and day from north and south. We dress up to the nines like you’re going to the biggest event ever.”

Addyson McCoy works at Dress Up and is a rising junior majoring in public relations. She noted polka dots, stripes and matching sets as current trends for women, as well as denim skirts, which she described as “so versatile.” McCoy said that “boots are really a staple,” and she personally enjoys sporting her red Adidas Samba sneakers.

“I feel like you can really show your personality throughout dressing for gamedays,” McCoy said. “It really is what you make it.”

According to McCoy, men’s fashion trends include red-and-black striped overalls, cotton T-shirts, baseball caps, cowboy hats and polo shirts.

“You see a lot of jerseys, which I feel like are timeless,” McCoy added.

Patrick Sowell, CEO of men’s clothing store Dick Ferguson’s, highlighted quarter-zips, softer and more casual coats

and quality, lightweight pieces that can be worn throughout the entire season. Sowell added that the store carries the brand Peter Millar, which has released new patterns for gamedays.

While some staples of gameday fashion have stood the test of time, Athens has seen trends come and go over the years.

Holly Stephenson studied risk management and insurance during her time as a UGA student before graduating in 1992. Stephenson, who attended home and away games every year, recalls that she and others dressed “a little more casual and a little more comfortable” than students today.

“You’d usually wear a nicer top or blouse with the jeans, usually tennis shoes for comfort,” Stephenson said. “Of course we wore a lot of jewelry, and then tried to make the hair look big ... you still wanted to look nice.”

Stephenson remembered that men wore jeans and T-shirts to games in the early fall, switching to sweatshirts and sweaters as the weather cooled deeper into the season.

Best friends and “partners in crime” Dana Melnick and Cortni Farmer both majored in communications before graduating from UGA in 1991 and 1992, respectively. According to Farmer, her friends call her a “fashionista,” but she thinks that Melnick is the “fashion-forward” one in the friendship.

Both Melnick and Farmer still attend Georgia football games, often tailgating together and making an entire day out of the event. Melnick remembered other women wearing long Laura Ashley dresses, with men in khakis, a white button down and sometimes a tie.

“Back then, people would always take dates to the game, so that was kind of the standard of what everybody would wear,” Melnick said. “They didn’t really care that much about red and black.”

Farmer recalled shopping at Harold’s with her friends on the weekends for long, ankle-length skirts to wear to gamedays, even in 90-degree weather. Now, one of her favorite gameday styles are “the cute little sneakers that are so in fashion,” such as Back 70s.

“Definitely fashion has changed now. Everybody is always in red and black, maybe a little bit of white, but now it’s like you

can’t ever wear the same thing twice,” Melnick said. “It’s like everybody has on some new red-and-black outfit that they just purchased, and you can tell it’s never been worn. It is kind of cool to see that.”

According to Melnick, there was no clear-bag-only policy in Sanford Stadium when they were students, so they could accessorize with bags or purses of any kind. UGA implemented this policy in 2017.

Creating personal style

Today, fans do not just stop at clothing; accessories are ever-growing in importance. Stylish clear bags, ribbons and bows in hair and on boots, Bulldogs-themed jewelry, hair glitter, Georgia stickers and face paint all make their way into the stadium.

Farmer said that the current popularity of buttons and pins is a “really big difference” between now and when she and Melnick were students. Women and men alike often accessorize with UGA or Kirby Smart buttons pinned onto their shirts, jackets and bags.

Gathered in the student section at each football game are several student groups and organizations that sport their own signature attire, adding to the creative mix of clothing choices and gameday traditions.

Members of the UGA Spike Squad wear signature football shoulder pads heavily decorated with large spikes, paired with thick black and red body paint. The UGA Paint Line consists of students covered in black and red body paint, each with a letter on their backs that together spell out words or phrases. Members of UGA’s Arch Society, who serve as the university’s official hosts and goodwill ambassadors, wear their signature black blazers in the front row of football games.

From long walks to Sanford, tailgating and spending time with friends, football gamedays can easily become an all-day event at UGA. Whether fans choose to sport the iconic UGA Stripe Game Bib Overalls, a Georgia football jersey, jeans and boots or a simple black dress, Saturdays in Athens are a time to express their creativity while showing their Bulldog pride.



A fan wears cowgirl boots during a Georgia vs. Ole Miss tailgate in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Oct. 18, 2025. PHOTO/THADDEE BARGE



UGA cheerleaders and Dance Dawgs run out onto the field during a game against the University of Kentucky at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Oct. 4, 2025. PHOTO/ASHTIN BARKER

On the sidelines

A look at the teams guiding the Georgia fan experience

By Ansley Jackson

During football games, most of the focus is on the field as fans watch the Bulldogs play their hearts out against the opposing team. However, a lot of hard work happens on the sidelines as well. The cheerleaders, UGA Flagline and Dance Dawgs spend countless hours preparing to keep fans entertained and energetic during the games.

Cheerleaders have kept the stadium fired up during football games for over 130 years. During the program's first game against Mercer University in 1892, student Bob Gantt led the crowd in cheers to support the team. Gantt is considered UGA's first documented cheerleader.

The student body later began selecting cheerleaders in special elections. Beginning in the 1920s, women joined the spirit squads after their admittance to UGA. The tryout system was introduced in the late 1940s.

Today, cheerleaders spend the game cheering, stunting or dancing to the marching band's music. Caleb Camesi, a bio-chemistry major and second-year cheerleader, described what goes into making gameday memorable for fans.

"We're just there to get the crowd hype," Camesi said. "Getting the fans engaged to try and have that home build advantage."

According to Camesi, the cheerleaders began going out on

the field during timeouts last season, with some tumbling across the end zone and others running the flag. By fostering close-knit friendships, the cheer squad has a lasting impact on its members.

"I was able to get super close [with] my teammates," Camesi said. "It just made all of the highs of the season feel even higher because we all were there for the lows together."

Camesi said his favorite memory on the team was the 2025 game against Texas. The atmosphere in the stadium during the night game was "elite," making it an unforgettable experience for Camesi.

"Just being right there on the field and getting to witness [was] just a surreal experience," Camesi said.

The UGA Flagline also plays a key role in firing up the crowd. Formerly known as the Bulldog Banners, the Flagline was founded in 1974 to bring color and energy to field shows.

Gamedays are packed with a full schedule for Flagline members. Before the game, the team has practice to prepare for the long day ahead. When the team arrives at Sanford Stadium, they participate in the Dawg Walk, a popular pre-game tradition. The team stays in the stands to cheer until around the second quarter, when they leave to warm up for their halftime performance. After halftime, they return to the stands for the rest of the game.

Flagline members form very close connections with each other. Breanne Talley, a rising senior criminal justice and

sociology major entering her third Flagline season, discussed how Flagline helped her make friends in college.

"This group of girls [is] absolutely amazing, some of my best friends in college," Talley said.

Talley said her favorite memory on the Flagline team was the 2025 SEC Championship game when Georgia beat Alabama 28-7.

"[Flagline] is a massive time commitment, but if it's something you really love doing and you enjoy, it's totally worth it," Talley said.

Finally, the Dance Dawgs also work hard on the sidelines during gamedays. Originally known as the Gits, the team was founded in 1959 as the first dance line in the SEC. They also went by the Go Girls and the Hot Shots before settling on their current name, the Dance Dawgs, in 1999.

The Golden Dawgs are a Dance Dawgs alumni group for dancers age 55 and older. The group can be seen at UGA's homecoming game and parade.

The Dance Dawgs have early mornings on gamedays as well, getting ready nearly eight hours before the game starts. The cheerleaders and Dance Dawgs load into trucks at Stegeman Coliseum and cheer from the truck beds as they drive around. The team then performs at a tailgate at the Georgia Center. The Dance Dawgs also participate in the Dawg Walk alongside the cheerleaders.



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Before the game, the Dance Dawgs hype up the fans as they wait for the players to come onto the field. Kate Cronenwett, a senior marketing major and fourth-year Dance Dawg, discussed the team's pregame activities.

"We do cheers and really rally up everyone that's waiting for the players at Dawg Walk for 45 minutes to an hour leading up to it," Cronenwett said. "We'll throw T-shirts and overall try to foster the energy for Georgia fans that are waiting at Dawg Walk."

“ It is not an easy task, but...it's one of the best experiences of my life.”

KATE CRONENWETT | FOURTH-YEAR DANCE DAWG

Before the players run onto the field, the team performs different dances to the band's music, spirting and keeping the

energy high. The Dance Dawgs also run out with the football team before circling back to their designated area near the student section.

The team continues to dance to music during the game, and also performs a routine in the end zone during timeouts.

Cronenwett shared advice for those considering joining the Dance Dawgs, emphasizing the huge commitment involved. However, she said being a part of the team is "so worth it."

"It's awesome being a part of something that is bigger than yourself," Cronenwett said. "It is not an easy task, but ... it's one of the best experiences of my life."

In addition to being on the sidelines, the Dance Dawgs also appear on ESPN College GameDay and SEC Nation.

"It's cool because you get to meet a lot of really cool people, and just being in that environment is awesome as well," Cronenwett said. "We do help foster that environment too, not just in Sanford, but all of the pregame experiences."

Although the football team receives most of the attention on gameday, the cheerleaders, UGA Flagline and Dance Dawgs also put in significant work to make the experience memorable for all the fans, fueling the energy that fills Sanford Stadium during every football game. Without the countless hours they spend practicing and preparing, the gameday atmosphere of Sanford Stadium would not be possible.



UGA flagline cheer during a football game between Georgia and Alabama at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Sept. 27, 2025. PHOTO/ETHAN GREENE



UGA cheerleaders perform during a game against the University of Mississippi at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Oct. 18, 2025. PHOTO/CAROLINE NEWBERN



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Georgia head coach Kirby Smart speaks with Georgia defensive lineman Xzavier McLeod (94) during the first half of the annual G-Day spring football game at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, April 18, 2026. PHOTO/LILY PERELLA

OPINION Where Georgia football has to improve to contend in 2026

Zach Pascuzzi

With the 2025 season well behind Georgia, marked by the high of beating Alabama in the SEC Championship Game for the Bulldogs' second consecutive conference crown, and the low of another Sugar Bowl elimination, this time at the hands of Ole Miss, there is plenty for head coach Kirby Smart to be both proud of and disappointed in as his team looks forward to the 2026 campaign.

In his first full year as the starting quarterback, redshirt senior Gunner Stockton showcased his mettle as an athletic, mobile quarterback able to absorb contact and extend plays on the ground. He became the first quarterback to lead Georgia in rushing touchdowns since 1942, and earned the most rushing yards by a Bulldog quarterback since 1987.

The explosive tandem of running backs Nate Frazier and Chauncey Bowens in the backfield resurrected a Georgia running game that finished 15th in the SEC in 2024, with the Bulldogs being the fourth-best unit just a year later.

The defense was heavily criticized as being a shell of previous Smart-coached teams at the start of the season, giving up 41 and 35 points even in wins over Tennessee and Ole Miss, but showed massive improvement down the stretch, giving up just 10, nine and seven points to Texas, Georgia Tech, and Alabama in the SEC title game, respectively.

Despite a multitude of top talents departing for the NFL, including record-setting receiver Zachariah Branch, offensive line stalwart Monroe Freeling and stellar linebacker CJ Allen, Georgia's transition to the upcoming season will be helped by the fact that it is retaining 61% of its total snaps, good for fifth nationally and first in the SEC and among last year's 12 CFP teams.

But if the Bulldogs are to effectively replace that lost production and make a true push for the national championship, they'll need to grow in several significant areas, namely the passing offense and pass rush.

With that in mind, here are three things Georgia must look to do better this year if they want to avoid another early exit from the College Football Playoff.

Let Gunner Stockton use his arm

One feature last year's contenders had in common, and an increasingly important requirement to contend for national titles, is having an elite passing offense. The last three teams to win it all-Michigan in 2023, Ohio State in 2024 and Indiana last year-have all been led by highly efficient quarterbacks capable of pulling off explosive pass plays that can push an offense down the field easily and quickly as they rack up touchdowns.

Unlike the last three national champions who tend to pass a lot, offensive coordinator Mike Bobo seems to heavily prefer the ground game, a rational strategy when blessed with as much backfield talent as the Bulldogs have, managing the game more so than playing it.

But when opposing defenses solved the run game, as Ole Miss did in the Sugar Bowl, Georgia's offense stagnated, with an inadequate vertical passing game unable to pick up enough momentum despite Stockton's reputation for handling difficult, high-pressure environments well.

"Third downs, play-clock management, playing on the road," Smart said. "There's nothing like having to go play in tough environments. And he just got better at managing things, understanding things, check system, run-to-run, run-to-pass."

Stockton, despite his powerful arm and experience, had

nearly a 70% completion percentage because of completing so many short passes. In fact, Stockton's average depth of target, or the distance his average pass traveled through the air before being caught, was 7.3 yards, lowest among the 12 CFP quarterbacks last year and second-lowest in the SEC. Screen passes to Branch were common, as the speedy receiver's yards after catch were a major boost to Stockton's stats.

But Georgia doesn't have Branch anymore. And Stockton is an efficient quarterback, particularly on fourth down and in the fourth quarter, where his completion percentage rose to 84% and he threw seven touchdowns and no interceptions.

He deserves more trust. And if Georgia can better utilize Stockton, his confidence and his dual-threat ability could make him a serious challenger for the Heisman Trophy.

“ We didn’t get our bang for our buck out of those play-actions ”

KIRBY SMART | GEORGIA FOOTBALL HEAD COACH

Bring the play-action pass back

This second item goes with the first, because Bobo's playcalling will play a huge role in determining Stockton's effectiveness.

Bobo was often the subject of heavy criticism last year for his perceived overreliance on short throws, in particular screen passes, even when they worked. But if Georgia wants to make the most out of not just its quarterback, but the entirety of its offensive unit, they need to call more play-actions and execute them better.

"We missed some of those opportunities whether it was vision, whether it was a busted route, whether it was busted protection," Smart said after the Sugar Bowl. "And when you play-action, you should have safe, good protection there. We didn't get our bang for our buck out of those play-actions."

There may not be a better play in football for an offense with both brilliant running backs and a quarterback with a powerful arm. Play-action passes are effective at creating explosive chunk plays because of their versatility and the defensive confusion they can cause.

Georgia has the credible running threat needed to deceive opposing defenses and overcommit the other team's secondary long enough to get wide receivers open.

Although Stockton will take a risk each time he turns his back to the play during the fake handoff, new offensive line coach Phil Rauscher should be up to the task of improving Stockton's pass protection, and Stockton's mobility gives him an advantage in avoiding sacks anyway.

Ramp up pressure on the opposing quarterback

Veteran defensive coordinator Glenn Schumann will return to Athens for his 11th season, but will be disappointed by what he saw in some facets of last year's defense. Georgia faced problems allowing early touchdowns and missing critical tackles, but one area particularly hard to reconcile with previous, championship-winning Bulldog teams was the inability to bring down the opposing quarterback.

Georgia's run defense was great — fourth nationally in rush yards allowed — but Smart and company know where the problem lies.

"We weren't effective enough in some other areas-being explosive, third downs," Smart said. "And then creating havoc in sacks and disruption on defense has to be better."

Georgia had just 20 sacks in 14 games, a mark good for last in the SEC and the lowest of Smart's tenure. The Bulldogs were 117th nationally in sacks per game and the team had zero sacks against Ole Miss in the Sugar Bowl.

In their postseason loss, and in the Bulldogs' other loss to Alabama in the regular season, the recurring theme was simply that quarterbacks Trinidad Chambliss and Ty Simpson had far too much time to throw the ball. Georgia combined for one sack in the two defeats, and it wasn't even of a quarterback; linebacker Chris Cole brought down the Crimson Tide's wide receiver Germie Bernard on a trick play.

However, a lack of talent won't be a problem for Schumann. He has Quintavius Johnson and Gabe Harris Jr. for outside linebackers, Raylen Wilson and Cole on the inside, and plenty of capable defensive backs to use in blitz packages like Ellis Robinson IV and KJ Bolden. Given the skill of the group available to him, being more aggressive from a defensive play-calling perspective may be how Schumann should react this season.



Georgia safety KJ Bolden (4) celebrates with linebacker Gabe Harris Jr. (0) during the first half of an NCAA football game between Georgia and Georgia Tech at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, Georgia, on Friday, Nov. 28, 2025. PHOTO/ETHAN GREENE

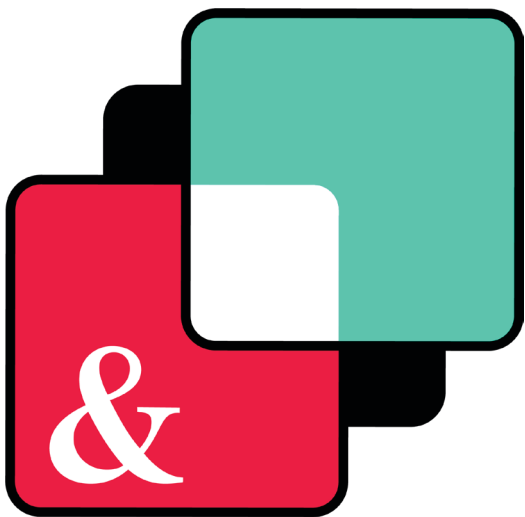
Zach Pascuzzi is a senior journalism student at UGA.

Highlights from the Dawg Walk during Georgia football’s 2025-2026 season



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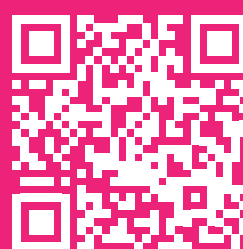
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