

SEC CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEW

EXTRA EDITION
DECEMBER 4, 2025

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ALABAMA

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Georgia wide receiver Zachariah Branch (1) points at the cameras during a game against Georgia Tech at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, Georgia, on Friday, Nov. 28, 2025. Georgia won 16-9.

PHOTO/KATHERINE DAVIS

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Another high-stakes battle

Georgia looks to improve 0-4 record against Alabama in SECCG

Ben Kule

Following its 27-20 win in the Iron Bowl over Auburn, Alabama will meet Georgia in the SEC championship game for the fifth time since 2012. Both teams finished with a 7-1 SEC record, with Georgia losing to Alabama in Athens in Week 5, while the Crimson Tide fell to Oklahoma at home in Week 12.

Alabama has had Georgia's number for years, winning 10 of the last 11 matchups dating back to 2008. In that stretch of dominance, the Crimson Tide defeated the Bulldogs all four times that the two have met in the SEC title game, while both teams have a win over the other in the national championship game.

Kirby Smart has won 11 or more games in eight of the 10 seasons he has served as Georgia's head coach, dominating just about every opponent en route to an impressive 116-20 record. Yet, even after serving as Alabama's defensive coordinator for eight seasons prior to taking over at Georgia, the Crimson Tide has been the one team Smart cannot seem to take down. Alabama is 7-1 against Smart and the Bulldogs, accounting for over a third of Georgia's losses in that span.

Tide rolled through Sanford

While Georgia has struggled against Alabama in many recent contests, the Crimson Tide had never played against Smart at Sanford Stadium before this September. Prior to Week 5's faceoff, Alabama's last visit to Athens came in 2015. The Crimson Tide entered as the 13th-ranked team in the country and cruised to a 38-10 victory over the eighth-ranked Bulldogs. But Georgia has come a long way as a program since then.

The Bulldogs entered this year's game with momentum, carrying in a 33-game home winning streak and coming off an impressive 44-41 overtime road win over Tennessee. Meanwhile, Alabama was on the brink of chaos. The Crimson Tide fell to Florida State as 13.5-point favorites in Week 1, and losing to Georgia would have put Alabama's playoff hopes in question early in the season.

Looking to prove it can win in any environment, Alabama came out firing. Quarterback Ty Simpson found wide receivers Germie Bernard and Isaiah Horton both for 6-yard touchdowns to go ahead 14-0. The Bulldogs answered, but a Simpson scamper for a 2-yard score in the final minute of the first half put the Crimson Tide ahead 24-14 at halftime.

The second half featured just one touchdown — a 1-yard rushing score from Georgia's Josh McCray. In the fourth quarter, Alabama defensive lineman LT Overton made a crucial fourth-and-1 stop, and the Crimson Tide rushing attack ticked away enough time off the clock to escape Sanford Stadium with a narrow 24-21 victory.

The defeat reinforced Alabama's dominance over Georgia, and ending the Bulldogs' lengthy home winning streak as underdogs made it all the more impressive. Georgia fell



Georgia defense in action during the Georgia vs. Alabama game at Bryant-Denny Stadium in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, on Saturday, Sept. 28, 2024. Alabama won 41-34. PHOTO/LANEY MARTIN

from No. 5 to No. 12, the lowest it would rank all season, while Alabama jumped from No. 17 to No. 10.

Battling in Atlanta

While Alabama has proven it can defeat Georgia in just about any venue, many of the biggest chapters of the rivalry have come at the Georgia Dome and Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta. The 2012 SEC championship game was the first time the two met in Atlanta since 1942, and the game did not disappoint.

The contest started slow with a scoreless first quarter, and Alabama led 10-7 at the half. Momentum swung in favor of the Bulldogs in the third quarter, as running back Todd Gurley quickly scored to reclaim the lead, and a blocked field goal returned for a touchdown put Georgia ahead 21-10. Alabama's T.J. Yeldon answered with an octopus — a touchdown and a 2-point conversion — to pull within three. After the two sides traded rushing scores to start the fourth quarter, Alabama quarterback A.J. McCarron delivered the dagger on a deep touchdown to Amari Cooper. Georgia was unable to score after that, and an interception sealed the Crimson Tide's 32-28 victory — the second of nine SEC titles won under head coach Nick Saban.

Since then, Alabama defeated Georgia in the 2018, 2021 and 2023 SEC title games. In the 2017 season, Georgia toppled Auburn in the conference championship game to reach the playoffs and met Alabama in the national championship, also held in Atlanta. The Bulldogs held a lead after a strong end to the first half, but 13 unanswered points from the Crimson Tide late forced overtime, and Alabama ultimately came out as champions, 26-23.



Georgia wide receiver Dominic Lovett (6) runs with the ball during the Georgia vs. Alabama game at Bryant-Denny Stadium in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, on Saturday, Sept. 28, 2024.

PHOTO/LANEY MARTIN

After Alabama beat Georgia for the SEC title in 2021, the two met again in the national title game, the only game in recent memory to go Georgia's way. This time held in Indianapolis, the game was back-and-forth until Kelee Ringo's iconic pick six for Georgia sealed its 33-18 victory and its first national title in 41 years.

Georgia and Alabama have often met when the stakes could not be higher, and this time is no different with another SEC crown and College Football Playoff positioning at stake.

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Battle of the titans

Georgia takes on Alabama in SEC title game

Owen McDaniel

For the fifth time in 14 years, Georgia will take on Alabama in the SEC championship game on Saturday. Though the Bulldogs have won the SEC title game three times under head coach Kirby Smart, this particular matchup has been a thorn in their side. Georgia has never beaten the Crimson Tide in the SEC championship game — even in 2021, when the Bulldogs downed Alabama 33-18 in the national championship game just five weeks later. Meanwhile, Alabama is looking for its first SEC title under head coach Kalen DeBoer, who has led the Crimson Tide to a 10-2 record in his second season at the helm.

Winning in the margins

If Alabama's 24-21 victory over Georgia on Sept. 27 is to serve as a blueprint for how Saturday's rematch will play out, a couple

of things are true: red zone efficiency will be paramount, and the game will be won or lost on third down.

In the Crimson Tide's win earlier this year, they capitalized on each of their four red zone trips, finding the end zone on three of them and converting a field goal on the other. However, the Bulldog defense kept Alabama out of the red zone for the entire second half, giving their offense a chance to nearly complete a comeback.

On the other hand, the Bulldogs scored on two of their three trips to the red zone, but the one unsuccessful trip ultimately cost them the game. On fourth-and-1 from the Alabama 8-yard line in the fourth quarter, Georgia right tackle Juan Gaston missed a block that allowed defensive lineman LT Overton to tackle running back Cash Jones for a loss. The Crimson Tide maintained their 3-point lead as a result, and the Bulldogs weren't able to get into

field-goal range on their final drive of the game. One minor mistake like Gaston's in September may have a major impact on the outcome of this Saturday's game.

While Alabama found major success on third downs against Georgia in September, its third-down conversion rate has dropped from just over 50% in its first eight games to 38.89% across its last four, including a 4-for-17 performance against Auburn last week. If Georgia can capitalize on this lull and dominate third down, it will be in excellent position to win its third SEC title in four years.

Playoff implications

While the SEC championship game carries an intrinsic importance of its own, it also often has a big influence on College Football Playoff seeding, and this year is no different. In some past instances, Georgia's performance in the SEC title game has completely dictated its inclusion in the playoffs. This

year, though, the Bulldogs are firmly slated in the CFP, but Saturday's game could affect their positioning.

Should Georgia finally break the chain of losses and conquer Alabama, it would all but clinch a top-four seed and first-round bye in the playoffs. That would put the Bulldogs one step closer to college football glory, but considering that all four teams that received first-round byes last season lost their second-round games, including Georgia, it may be a curse disguised as a blessing. If the Crimson Tide subdue the Bulldogs once again, Georgia would likely drop to either No. 5 or No. 6 in the CFP rankings, meaning it would host the No. 11 or No. 12 seed in the first round of the playoffs. While this path requires an extra playoff win to reach the national championship game, winning that first-round game could give Georgia the momentum it needs for a title push.

The stakes are much higher for Alabama. The 10-2 Crimson Tide were ranked No. 10 in the CFP rankings released on Nov. 25, meaning that a loss in the SEC title game could drop them at least one or two places. The 11th- and 12th-ranked teams will likely not make the 12-team playoff field because of the spots reserved for the five highest-ranked conference champions. The Atlantic Coast Conference champion and a Group of Five conference champion, or possibly two Group of Five champions, will claim the No. 11 and No. 12 seed, bumping the teams ranked there out of the CFP. If Alabama beats Georgia, it would both solidify its place in the CFP and possibly earn home-field advantage or even a bye in the first round, depending on how far the selection committee would move the Crimson Tide up.

Prediction

Georgia enters Saturday riding an eight-game win streak and a hard-fought rivalry win over No. 23 Georgia Tech. Alabama is coming off a home loss to Oklahoma and an upset scare in the Iron Bowl against Auburn, which has just one SEC win this season. The Bulldogs look like they are hitting their stride, while the Crimson Tide seems to be stumbling to the finish line. However, the past is a strong predictor, and even some of the strongest Georgia teams in recent memory couldn't clear this hurdle. As such, the Bulldogs will make it a close contest, which this series almost always produces, but Alabama will likely extend its run of superiority over Georgia.

Prediction: Alabama 21, Georgia 16



Georgia's defensive line takes on Alabama's offense during a game between Georgia and Alabama at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Sept. 27, 2025. Alabama won 24-21. PHOTO/ETHAN GREENE

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Highlights from the Week 14 game against Georgia Tech



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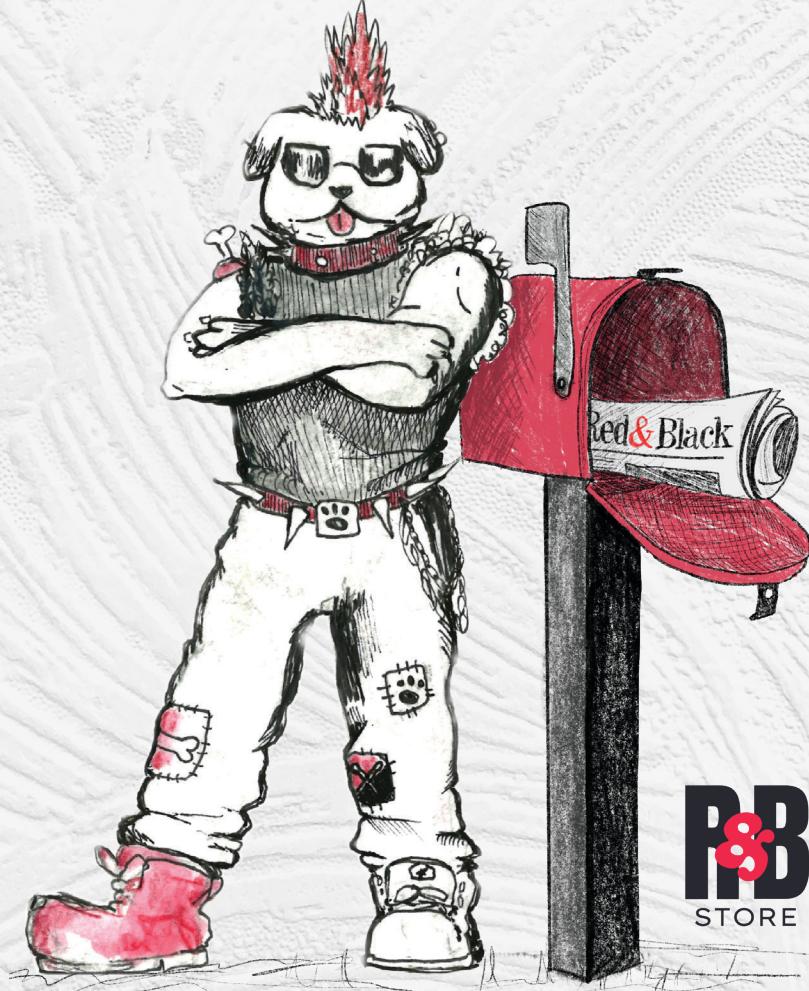
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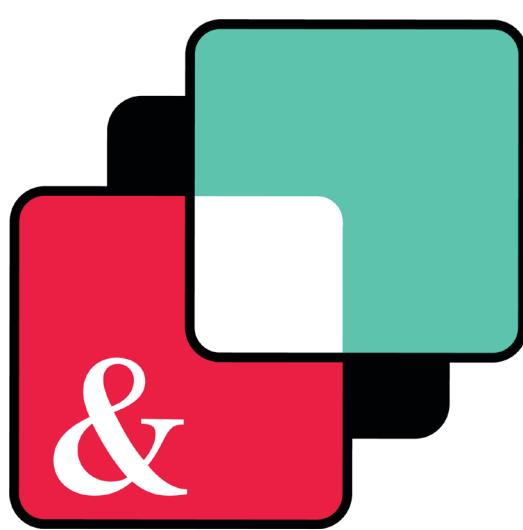
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Perfect peak

Gabe Harris Jr. finds form ahead of postseason

Braden Brownell

Gabe Harris Jr. has emerged as a key force in the resurgence of Georgia's pass rush this season. Entering the year, the Bulldogs' ability to pressure opposing quarterbacks was uncertain, with a young and largely unproven group of edge rushers. Through the first eight games, Georgia managed just eight sacks — a sluggish start that reflected the inexperience of the unit.

Despite the slow start to the year from Georgia's defensive front, Harris had some big moments early in the season. On just the second defensive snap of the year, Harris wrestled Marshall running back Antwan Roberts to the ground behind the line of scrimmage for a loss. In the third quarter, Harris, along with multiple other Georgia defenders, wrapped up Roberts behind the line of scrimmage again to set up a third-and-long. Harris has only become a more

influential piece of the defense as the season has progressed, including a strong performance to hold off Florida on Nov. 1, when defenders Jordan Hall and Demello Jones left with injuries and KJ Bolden was ejected after a targeting penalty.

Over the final four games of the regular season, however, the pass rush hit another gear, registering nine sacks and creating consistent disruption. Harris has been central to that turnaround. Although he didn't

record a sack against Georgia Tech, he repeatedly broke into the backfield, recording three pressures and two quarterback hurries. He looked strong, fast and violent off the edge.

Utilized primarily as an edge rusher, Harris has become a critical part of defensive coordinator Glenn Schumann's unit. His development has been pivotal to Georgia's pass-rush renaissance, helping the unit regain its dominant form late in the season.

He has also emerged as a leader on one of the youngest defenses Georgia has fielded in recent years, serving as a captain against Texas and Alabama.

Harris' growth has been especially evident over the back half of the 2025 season. In the win over Texas, he delivered one of his most complete performances to date, recording a sack for a 9-yard loss, 1 1/2 tackles for loss and four quarterback hurries.

Before stepping into a bigger role this fall, Harris spent two seasons steadily climbing Georgia's depth chart. As a freshman in 2023, he appeared in 11 games as a reserve outside linebacker and logged nine tackles, including three for loss. He delivered a standout moment in the Capital One Orange Bowl, forcing a fumble and recording a tackle for a 10-yard loss against Florida State.

By 2024, Harris had carved out a larger role, appearing in all 14 games as a rotational piece. He tied for the team lead in forced fumbles and finished the year with 14 tackles, two sacks and 3 1/2 tackles for loss.

Originally the lowest ranked of Georgia's three edge rusher signees in the 2023 class, Harris was not projected to be a star. But Georgia needed Harris to take a big step in 2025. The Bulldogs had to replace a bulk of its 2024 pass rush as Mykel Williams, Jalon Walker, Tyrion Ingram-Dawkins, Nazir Stackhouse and Warren Brinson departed for the NFL, and, with Damon Wilson II and Sam M'Pemba entering the transfer portal, Harris quickly became the most experienced option at edge rusher. He was the only returning scholarship player in the room with more than four career tackles, so Harris was asked to lead — and likely play multiple roles.

"I just want to be a valuable player no matter where they play me," Harris said before the start of the 2025 season.

He has certainly done that and more, and he'll aim to continue his contributions into the postseason. It will be needed as Georgia looks to avenge its regular-season loss to Alabama and win the SEC championship this Saturday.



Georgia outside linebacker Gabe Harris Jr. (0) applies pressure against Charlotte quarterback Grayson Loftis (12) during the first half of the football game between Georgia and Charlotte at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Nov. 22, 2025. Georgia won 35-3. PHOTO/HOSANNA WORKU

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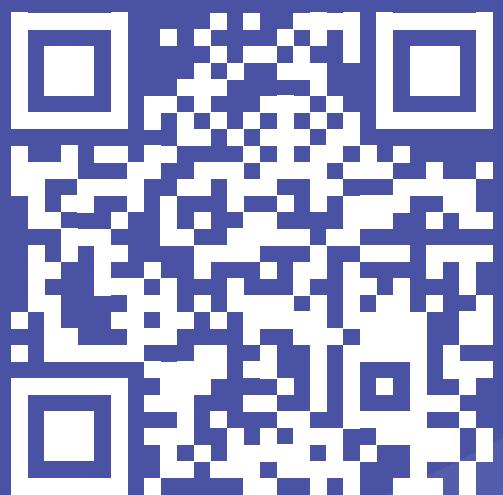
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