

SEC CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEW

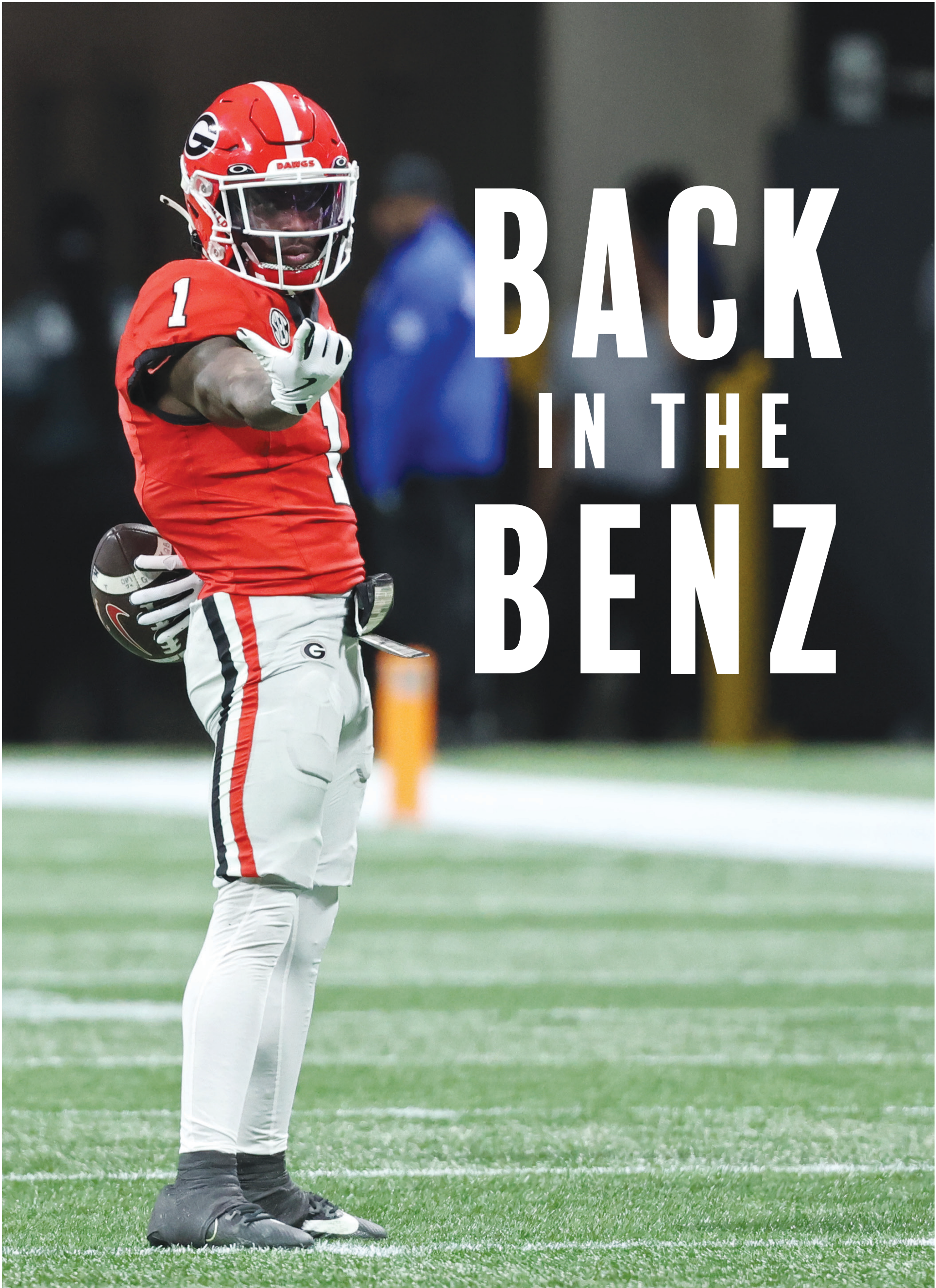
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GEORGIA *VS.*
ALABAMA

MERCEDES-BENZ STADIUM, ATLANTA



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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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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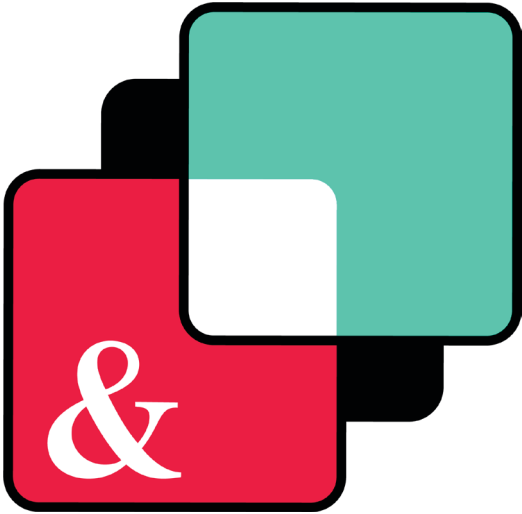
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Perfect peak

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 ½ 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 ½ 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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