GAMEDAY PREVIEW

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GEORGIA *VS.* AUBURN

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ONE DOWN & ONE TO GO

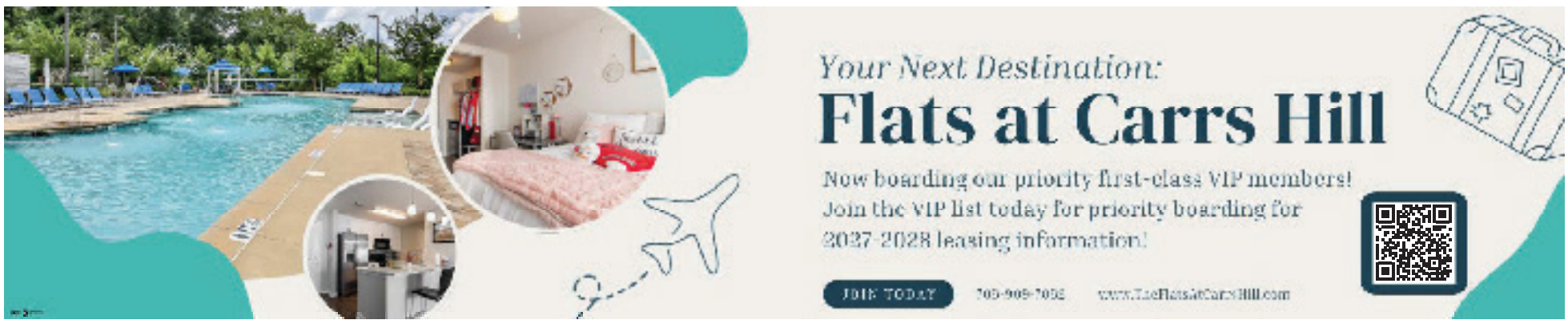


Georgia running back Dwight Phillips Jr. (20) celebrates during a football game against Vanderbilt at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Oct. 3, 2026. Georgia won 38-14. PHOTO/JESSE CORSO

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Another taste of history

Georgia's most frequent opponent returns to Athens

Ben Kule

Thirty years after Georgia mascot Uga V's iconic leap at Auburn wide receiver Robert Baker, the "Deep South's Oldest Rivalry" between the Bulldogs and Tigers is still going strong.

No team has faced Georgia as frequently as Auburn, and that tradition is guaranteed to continue until at least 2029, with the Tigers being listed as one of the Bulldogs' three protected SEC opponents.

Not only has Auburn been on the calendar annually since 1919 — with the sole exception of 1943 — it has also been one of Georgia's tightest rivals, with the Bulldogs narrowly leading the all-time series 66-56-8.

That record was even closer to an even split until recently. Georgia enters this year's matchup on a nine-game win streak against Auburn, with 18 wins in the last 21 matches.

The SEC expanded to 12 teams in 1992 and split into two divisions, separating Georgia and Auburn. Still, the rivalry remained on the calendars each year, and the teams even met an additional time in 2017 when each team won its division to advance to the conference championship.

In a defensive battle, Georgia overcame a slow start, blanking Auburn in the final three quarters as head coach Kirby Smart took home his first SEC title with the Bulldogs, 28-7.

While there have been countless iconic moments throughout the rivalry, some defining moments, old and new, stand out for both programs.

1996: Georgia 56, Auburn 49

In the highest-scoring matchup in the rivalry's history, Georgia entered Auburn's Jordan-Hare Stadium with a lot to prove. The game's most remembered image came after the Tigers opened the scoring, as Georgia's live mascot's near bite of Baker earned him a Sports Illustrated cover and the dubious honor of "the nation's best college mascot."

That fierce spirit resonated throughout the team, even when trailing 28-7. Georgia quarterback Mike Bobo, who later served as Auburn's offensive coordinator briefly before landing back in Athens in that same position, led the Bulldogs to three touchdown-scoring drives to end regulation tied.

In the past, the game would have concluded in a tie, but because the SEC ditched ties earlier that year, the game continued. For the first time in conference history, a game was going to overtime. And not just one, but four.

The teams traded three rushing touchdowns each before Georgia scored a fourth and forced a turnover on downs, capping off one of the wildest wins in matchup history.

2013: Auburn 43, Georgia 38

Then-No. 7 Auburn entered its 11th game in 2013 with no room for error, in reach of the national championship game but needing to defend its home turf against No. 25 Georgia.

The Tigers appeared to be doing just that, storming out to a quick 13-0 advantage and leading 27-7 towards the end of the first half. The Bulldogs showed life but Auburn punched right back, carrying a 37-17 lead into the fourth quarter.

Just when it looked like Georgia was out, quarterback Aaron Murray took over. Murray continued to strike through the air and led the Bulldogs to 21 straight points, scoring two passing touchdowns and one rushing touchdown in the process to take a one-point lead in the final two minutes.



Georgia quarterback Gunner Stockton (14) during a game against Auburn at Jordan-Hare Stadium in Auburn, Alabama, on Sunday, Oct. 11, 2025. Georgia won 20-10. PHOTO COURTESY/CONOR DILLON/UGAAA

The Bulldogs had stunned Jordan-Hare, and then forced the Tigers to their last hope on fourth-and-18. Auburn quarterback Nick Marshall sent a prayer into triple coverage, and a fortunate deflection landed in wide receiver Ricardo Louis' arms for a miraculous game-winning score.

That touchdown turned out to be just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to miracles for the 2013 Tigers. In its next game, Auburn famously defeated Alabama on the "Kick Six," and the pair of astounding wins lifted the Tigers to the final national championship game before the College Football Playoff era began.

2025: Georgia 20, Auburn 10

Georgia entered last year's contest as favorites due to Auburn's 0-3 SEC start, but the road win was no walk in the park.

The Bulldogs punted away their first three drives and missed a field goal on the other, barely scraping out three points in the final second of the first half to avoid entering the locker room scoreless.

Down 10-3, running back Chauncey Bowens scored a third-quarter rushing touchdown to tie the game, and the Georgia defense held strong. A field goal finally gave the Bulldogs a lead, and quarterback Gunner Stockton's dive over the pylon gave him a rushing touchdown and the final points Georgia would need to hold on and win by 10.

The win was far from pretty, but it served as a wake-up call. The Bulldogs looked much better in their next game, defeating No. 5 Ole Miss 43-35, and took down two more top-10 teams en route to a CFP berth.

Georgia is expected to extend its win streak over Auburn to double digits Saturday, but if the history of the matchup tells us anything, winning any game in the Deep South's Oldest Rivalry is no small task.

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Georgia wide reciever Colbie Young (8) runs with the ball during a football game against Auburn at Sanford Stadium on Saturday, Oct. 5, 2024 in Athens, Georgia. Georgia won 31-13. PHOTO/LANEY MARTIN

Familiar rivalry, new-look Auburn

Georgia looks to continue dominance over Tigers

Evan Waldman

For more than a century, Georgia and Auburn have met in one of college football's oldest rivalries. Recently, however, the "Deep South's Oldest Rivalry" has belonged to one side: the Bulldogs.

After defeating Auburn's neighbors in Tuscaloosa, Georgia — which is now ranked No. 1 for the first time since 2024 — will welcome Auburn to Sanford Stadium for the 131st meeting between the two programs. The Bulldogs lead the all-time series 66-56-8 and have continued to widen that margin in recent years.

Georgia has won nine consecutive games against Auburn, tying its longest winning streak of the rivalry. The Bulldogs previously won nine straight meetings from 1923-31. Georgia has also won 20 of the 27 meetings since 2000, turning what was once an extremely balanced rivalry increasingly in its favor.

Head coach Kirby Smart has played a major role in that shift. Smart holds a 10-1 record against Auburn since taking over the Georgia program, with his lone loss coming in a 40-17 defeat at Jordan-Hare Stadium during the 2017 regular season. The Bulldogs responded less than a month later, defeating the Tigers 28-7 in the SEC championship game.

Georgia's recent victories have continued to add to that dominance. The Bulldogs defeated Auburn 42-10 in 2022, survived a 27-20 game at Jordan-Hare in 2023 and won 31-13 in Athens in 2024.

Last season's meeting required another comeback.

Georgia trailed Auburn by 10 before scoring 20 unanswered points in a 20-10 victory. The Bulldogs held the Tigers scoreless in the second half, while quarterback Gunner Stockton capped an 8-minute, 45-second fourth-quarter drive with a 10-yard touchdown run.

Now, Auburn returns to Athens with another opportunity to snap the streak, while Georgia, hot off its 20-17 road victory over Alabama, will look to establish its longest winning streak over the Tigers in series history.

New era at Auburn

While Georgia has become accustomed to beating Auburn in recent years, the Tigers will arrive in Athens under new leadership.

After firing Hugh Freeze in early November of 2025 and having D.J. Durkin serve as the interim head coach for the final games of the 2025 season, the Tigers hired Alex Golesh as their 33rd head coach in late November 2025.

Golesh returned to the SEC after spending three seasons turning around a South Florida program that had won just four games over the previous three seasons.

South Florida improved from 1-11 the season before Golesh arrived to 7-6 in his first year, the largest single-season turnaround in South Florida history. During his tenure, the Bulls won 23 games across his three seasons, including a 9-3 regular-season record in 2025.

Golesh also brings previous SEC experience to Auburn. Before taking over at USF, he served as Tennessee's offensive coordinator and tight ends coach for two seasons. During that span, the Volunteers went from No. 108 nationally in total offense to No. 7 in 2021, averaging 39.3 points per game.

The Tigers have experienced both sides of the spectrum under Golesh through the beginning of his first season.

Auburn opened with consecutive victories before falling to Florida in its SEC opener. The Tigers rebounded by defeating Vanderbilt 21-15 before falling to Golesh's old team, the Volunteers, 24-14.

Auburn's most recent loss showed both the potential and growing pains of a program adjusting to a new coaching staff. The Tigers led the Volunteers 7-3 at halftime but struggled to minimize the Volunteers' rushing attack in the second half. Tennessee running back DeSean Bishop finished with 220 rushing yards and three touchdowns.

For Golesh, however, his first season has been focused on more than immediate results. In the ever-changing college football world, establishing an identity and embracing change were Golesh's most important objectives in his first season.

"I don't set goals … I set standards," Golesh said at SEC Media Days in August. "Change is incredibly hard in this day and age, and these guys have embraced change."

Coming off its bye week, an advantage that could help Auburn Saturday, the Tigers have a new leader in the Deep South's Oldest Rivalry.

Establishing the run against Auburn defense

Georgia has yet to establish a consistent feature running back this season, but not for a lack of options.

Injuries have forced the Bulldogs to rely on a committee in the backfield through the first six games. Nate Frazier started Georgia's first three contests before suffering an injury against Arkansas that kept him out against Oklahoma. Frazier returned against Vanderbilt but had just two carries for nine yards.

Chauncey Bowens has helped fill the void, scoring a team-high six rushing touchdowns despite also battling injuries. Dwight Phillips Jr. has provided another option out of the backfield, while sophomore Bo Walker emerged against Vanderbilt with a team-high 71 rushing yards on five attempts, highlighted by a 59-yard run.

Despite the constant rotation, Georgia has continued to find production on the ground. The Bulldogs are averaging 211.8 rushing yards per game and have received contributions throughout the depth chart.

That depth could become particularly important against Auburn.

The Tigers struggled to contain Tennessee's rushing attack, especially after halftime. Tennessee running back DeSean Bishop rushed 34 times for 220 yards and three touchdowns, accounting for more than two-thirds of the Volunteers' 323 total yards in Auburn's 24-14 loss.

Golesh pointed directly toward the Tigers' inability to limit the ground game afterward.

"Not being able to stop the run in the second half, that's the story of the game, and that's where our focus has to be," Golesh said after the defeat.



Georgia head coach Kirby Smart during a football game between Georgia and Auburn at Jordan-Hare Stadium in Auburn, Alabama, on Saturday, Sept. 30, 2023. Georgia won 27-20. FILE/LANDON TODD)

Georgia's backfield may not have one clear lead option entering the matchup, but Auburn's struggles against Tennessee could allow the Bulldogs to turn their depth at running back into an advantage.

Byrum Brown poses a unique challenge

Georgia has made running the football difficult for a majority of its opponents thus far. Auburn quarterback Byrum Brown could present a different challenge.

Through five games, the Bulldogs have allowed just 74.7 rushing yards and 2.5 yards per carry. Opponents have scored only five rushing touchdowns against a Georgia defense that has been dominant in the trenches.

Brown, however, gives Auburn another way to attack teams on the ground. The USF transfer followed his head coach and was named the starting quarterback after being highly sought after in the transfer portal.

The dual-threat quarterback rushed for a season-high 107 yards and a touchdown in Auburn's defeat to Tennessee. His biggest play came in the fourth quarter when he broke free for 57 yards, helping Auburn travel 94 yards in just four plays.

Brown also has the ability to create when plays break down, as he scored a 7-yard rushing touchdown after muscling away three Tennessee rushers and outrunning two more Volunteers.

Brown has a unique feature that makes him an intriguing challenge for the Bulldogs: his experience. Brown has 37 career starts, the most in the SEC by a quarterback and fifth-most nationally. When Auburn arrives between the hedges, they will be led by a quarterback who has the experience to make an impact in the game.

SEC picture and what's at stake

Beyond the history surrounding the rivalry, the matchup could carry significant weight in the SEC standings.

Georgia enters the game against Auburn 6-0, keeping the Bulldogs at the top of the SEC standings as they move deeper into their nine-game SEC schedule.

Auburn, on the other hand, has less room for error.

The Tigers enter 3-2 overall and 1-2 in SEC play after losses to Florida and Tennessee. A loss to Georgia would give Auburn three conference defeats through its first four SEC games.

The matchup also begins a difficult stretch for the Tigers. Following its trip to Athens, Auburn will face LSU and Ole Miss in consecutive weeks as Golesh navigates his first SEC schedule as the leader of the Tigers.

With Georgia looking to remain perfect and Auburn trying to climb back into the SEC race, the Deep South's Oldest Rivalry will carry greater implications than just being another showdown between two storied enemies.

Prediction

Georgia's rushing attack and depth within the running back room will be the difference against the Tigers. Gunner Stockton will continue to manage the game while limiting any costly mistakes, allowing the Georgia offense to flourish.

The Auburn offense has shown flashes, but they have yet to face a linebacking crew like the one that the Bulldogs have. Brown's dual-threat ability will challenge the Bulldogs, but Auburn's offense could struggle to consistently sustain drives in a hostile Sanford Stadium environment.

Georgia should pull away in the second half and make series history by extending its winning streak over Auburn to 10 games.

Prediction: Georgia 38, Auburn 17



Georgia running back Dwight Phillips Jr. (20) runs with the ball during a football game against Vanderbilt in Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Oct. 3, 2026. Georgia won 38-14. PHOTO/LILY PERELLA

Climbing up

AJ Kruah earning snaps in Georgia's loaded linebacker room

Ryan Erdossy

Two Butkus Award watchlist members. Three five-stars. The team's leading tackler.

That's Georgia's inside linebacker room.

For sophomore AJ Kruah, that is the competition for playing time at Georgia.

And in a position group loaded with experience and recruiting pedigree, he has found a way onto the field.

Senior Raylen Wilson anchors the room, starting every game in the 2025 season. He dealt with a minor knee issue in the spring, causing him to be sidelined. His absence gave younger players like Kruah more opportunities to receive valuable reps in the offseason.

In the season opener against Tennessee State, Kruah recorded two solo tackles. The following week, he made his biggest impact yet against Western Kentucky, forcing a fumble on the opening kickoff return and finishing with a team-leading five tackles.

"Man, AJ just keeps showing up," fellow inside linebacker Terrell Foster said before the Oklahoma game. "He just flies around and tries to be as physical as possible. He represents what we try to do as linebackers to the fullest extent."

Kruah continued to contribute in SEC play, recording three tackles against both Arkansas and Oklahoma. He is currently tied for ninth on the team in total tackles, trailing three other inside linebackers: Wilson, Chris Cole and Justin Williams.

Kruah appeared in just two games last season against Marshall and Austin Peay.

A year later, his teammates noticed the difference.

"I have just seen AJ grow so much," Williams said before the Oklahoma game. "I feel like he is showing up in games and he is taking on that role that Coach [Kirby] Smart is asking him to do, whether that is special teams or just getting in when coach calls his name, and I feel that AJ is taking that very seriously."



Georgia linebacker AJ Kruah (13) celebrates a tackle during the second half of a football game against Western Kentucky at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Sept. 12, 2026. Georgia won 70-20. PHOTO/HOSANNA WORKU



Georgia linebacker AJ Kruah (13) tackles Western Kentucky running back Kalib Hicks (9) during a game at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia on Saturday, Sept. 12, 2026. Georgia won 70-20. PHOTO/EVAN FRILINGOS

Kruah initially committed to North Carolina in April 2024 before flipping his commitment to Georgia six months later after receiving an offer from the Bulldogs.

In an interview with DawgNation, the sophomore said defensive coordinator Glenn Schumann contributed to his decision, highlighting his "insane" knowledge and ability to prepare players for the next level.

Kruah said that before joining the Bulldogs, he watched his favorite Georgia linebackers, Jalon Walker and Nakobe Dean, advance to the next level.

Schumann's track record gives Georgia linebackers a clear path toward the professional league. Over the past five NFL drafts, seven Georgia linebackers have been selected, including two in the first round.

At Marietta High School, Kruah played six different positions, seeing snaps at defensive end, linebacker, tight end, running back, wide receiver and even quarterback in some wildcat schemes.

Kruah finished his senior season with 427 receiving yards and 46 solo tackles, leading his team in both categories.

The 6-foot-1, 225-pounder found similar success as a junior, totaling 70 tackles, including 55 solo tackles, to bring his high school total to 175.

Kruah said Schumann praised his game coming out of high school, saying he reminded him of previous linebackers he had coached. Even before arriving in Athens, Kruah understood he would have to earn his place on Georgia's depth chart.

"I know my playing style, I know where I can play, I know my capability of playing," Kruah said to DawgNation in 2024. "So if I do go to UGA, I know I will work my way up on the board."

The Bulldogs enter the heart of their SEC schedule coming off a historic road win over No. 6 Alabama, with three currently ranked opponents waiting after Auburn. Kruah's contributions in the defensive rotation and on special teams could become increasingly valuable as Georgia enters the most demanding stretch of its schedule.

After the annual G-Day scrimmage, head coach Smart noted the linebacker group would need depth "to be able to get where we want to go." Five months later, Kruah has made the case that he could be the answer, especially if he continues with his steady production on defense and special teams.

Against the Tigers, Kruah will face an offense averaging over 160 yards on the ground, led by Jeremiah Cobb, an All-SEC third team selection a season ago.

Smart has made it clear that recruiting stars and a high school resume do not determine who plays at Georgia. What matters is what a player does once he arrives in Athens. Kruah has produced and earned opportunities in one of the Bulldogs' deepest position groups. Against Auburn, he will have another chance to show why.



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Highlights from 2023 and 2024 Auburn games


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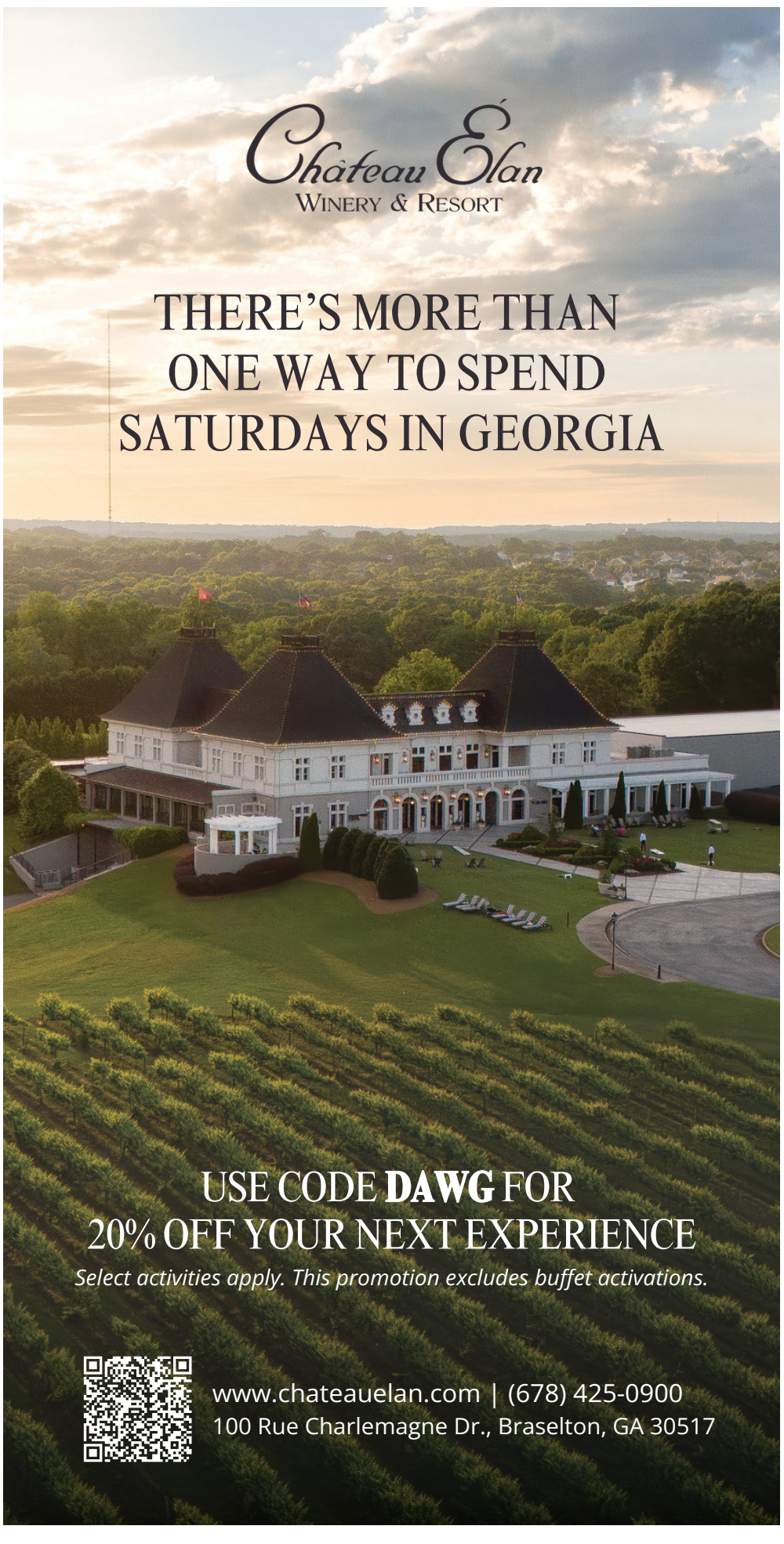

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GRAPHIC/JACK HESPRICH

OPINION A rivalry on the ropes

Zach Pascuzzi

Down 38-37 and facing a fourth-and-18 from its own 27-yard line, the odds were stacked against Auburn. The Tigers were one play away from completely squandering what had been a 37-17 lead with less than ten minutes to go.

Jordan-Hare needed a prayer, and it got the "Prayer at Jordan-Hare."

Tigers quarterback Nick Marshall's 73-yard touchdown pass to wide receiver Ricardo Louis — only made possible by Georgia linebacker Josh Harvey-Clemons inadvertently tipping the ball out of the reach of safety Tray Matthews — was the final word in Auburn's 43-38 win and remains one of the most iconic memories across 130 previous editions of the Deep South's Oldest Rivalry between the Bulldogs and Tigers.

The rivalry, renewed annually since 1919 with only one exception, is a tradition built on memories.

That's why it is now at risk of becoming one itself.

Since Auburn's prayer was answered 13 years ago, the Tigers have beaten Georgia just once in the 13 games since: a 40-17 win in 2017 in Auburn that the Bulldogs avenged that same season by crushing the Tigers in the SEC championship game, 28-7.

Auburn hasn't been truly competitive in the rivalry for almost the entirety of the 21st century. In 26 games against the Bulldogs over that span, the Tigers have won just six. They haven't beaten the Bulldogs since that regular season victory nine years ago, and haven't won consecutive contests since 2004 and 2005, the latter of which was the last time they won at Sanford Stadium.

Their struggles have largely been on offense. In all but three games since 2011, the Tigers have failed to score 20 or more points. Across those games, 10 of Georgia's 14 victories have come by double digits.

A rivalry that doesn't breed close competition doesn't produce many memorable moments, and an unmemorable rivalry is not one that will endure.

But the lack of parity is not the sole reason the rivalry is failing. After all, Georgia has equally dominated Florida in recent years, but the animosity and traditions associated with one of college football's most famous neutral-site games will never disappear.

It's also because the Bulldogs have found a new opponent to care more about an enemy to match its ambitions as a team looking to win conference titles and bring home national championships.

As it so happens, it's another team from Alabama. Except this one wears crimson.

The Bulldogs and the Crimson Tide admittedly do not have the shared history that Georgia has with Auburn. Alabama and Georgia have not been guaranteed to meet in a given year since 1965, and unlike the Bulldogs and Tigers, were not named permanent cross-division rivals when the SEC split into two divisions in 1992.

Further expansion of the SEC in 2012 to 14 teams meant that Georgia and Alabama would only meet once in the regular season every six years. Since the end of their annual showdowns 61 years ago, they have played a mere 26 times.

Among that tally, though, are five SEC championship and two CFP national championship meetings, and the relative frequency of the Bulldogs and Crimson Tide playing in big games against each other has forged a rivalry that does not need to be historic to be just as hateful.

Unlike in its series against Auburn, Georgia can't claim the upper hand. The Crimson Tide leads the Bulldogs all-time 45-28-4, were victorious in the first four of those SEC title run-ins and staged multiple large comebacks to beat Georgia on the biggest stage, including a 13-point rally in the 2018 national championship and a recovery from 14 points down in the SEC Championship Game later that year. However, that works in the rivalry's favor, as Georgia is now all the more desperate to beat Alabama every time they play, and establish the same type of supremacy over the SEC and college football that Nick Saban's vaunted program enjoyed for so many years.

The Bulldogs' 33-18 win over the Crimson Tide for the national championship in 2022 and their 28-7 victory for the SEC title in 2025 were worth far more to Georgia than any win over Auburn in the same timeframe.

The Deep South's Oldest Rivalry may be down, but it is not yet out. Under the new nine-game SEC schedule format announced in 2026, Auburn and Georgia are still protected opponents that will play every year, at least until 2029 when the matchups are revisited.

If the Tigers, who haven't finished with a winning record since 2020, can return to winning ways, they may inject the rivalry with a much-needed boost. If not, then it may only be a matter of years before the rivalry becomes biennial.

But as for right now, Georgia has bigger things, and better teams, to worry about.

Zach Pascuzzi is a senior journalism major at the University of Georgia.

NUMBERS TO KNOW: Week 7

#20

Georgia running back Dwight Phillips Jr.

Phillips has accumulated 319 total yards over the last three games, showing off his speed and pass catching ability. He served as Georgia's starting running back against Alabama, picking up 120 rushing yards on 17 carries. Phillips also had a career-long 30-yard catch earlier in the game and 84 rushing yards against Oklahoma two weeks before. His receiving production gives Georgia another weapon out of the backfield, especially as the Bulldogs continue to lean on the passing game.

Auburn linebacker Elijah Melendez

#9

Melendez has become one of Auburn's most active defenders in his second season on the Plains. The sophomore has already posted double-digit tackles against Baylor and Florida, and he added nine tackles and a sack against Tennessee, bringing his season sack total to three. Melendez also recorded six tackles in Auburn's loss to Georgia last season, including two tackles for loss and a sack. With Georgia averaging 211.8 rushing yards per game, Auburn will need Melendez to help slow down the Bulldogs' ground game and keep Georgia from controlling the line of scrimmage.

Georgia defensive lineman Jordan Hall

#44

Hall has been a steady presence on Georgia's defensive line during his senior season. The 320-pound veteran has started all six games and has recorded four solo tackles, including 1 1/2 tackles for loss. Hall has had an impressive last two weeks, registering three tackles against Vanderbilt and two against Alabama. His impact goes beyond the stat sheet, as Georgia has allowed just 74.7 rushing yards per game through five games. Hall and the rest of Georgia's front will face an Auburn offense that has struggled to consistently move the ball.

Auburn wide receiver Keshaun Singleton

#11

Singleton has quickly become one of the most reliable targets in Auburn's passing game. The junior transfer has caught a pass in 20 consecutive games and reached 100 career receptions against Tennessee. He led Auburn with seven catches for 54 yards in the loss to the Volunteers and had seven catches for 99 yards and a touchdown against Florida earlier this season. Singleton also had a 48-yard catch against Florida, showing his ability to create the explosive plays Auburn may need against a Georgia defense allowing just 186.8 passing yards per game.

Georgia kicker Peyton Woodring

#91

Woodring broke a program record with his performance against Oklahoma in Week 4. The senior kicker made his 201st consecutive extra point, passing Rodrigo Blankenship for the most consecutive extra points in Georgia history. Woodring is now 208 of 208 on extra point attempts in his career. He also made a 49-yard field goal against Oklahoma, his longest of the season, and enters the Auburn game with just one miss on the year. Woodring has become one of Georgia's most reliable players on special teams. His consistency could be important against Auburn, especially if the Bulldogs find themselves in a close game late.

Auburn quarterback Byrum Brown

#17

Brown has given Auburn a dual-threat quarterback capable of changing a game with his arm or his legs. The senior has already rushed for 107 yards in a game this season, doing so in Auburn's 24-14 loss to Tennessee. He also scored a rushing touchdown in that game and completed 22 of 33 passes for 159 yards. Brown entered the season after accounting for 42 touchdowns at USF in 2025, including 28 passing and 14 rushing. Georgia's defense will have to limit Brown's ability to extend plays and create yards outside the pocket.

Layla Nicholson

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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 Oct. 1 edition, on page A3, the incorrect photo and caption was used. The Red & Black regrets this error. 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.



Georgia offensive lineman Drew Bobo (74) during a football game against Tennessee State at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Sept. 5, 2026. Georgia won 63-3. PHOTO/LILY KATE AKINS

The Bobo flip

Former Auburn commit Drew Bobo finds his way to Athens

Layla Nicholson

When Drew Bobo committed to Auburn back in October 2021, his decision made perfect sense.

His father, Mike Bobo, was Auburn's offensive coordinator. Drew Bobo was an offensive lineman at Auburn High School, just minutes from the Tigers' campus — and Georgia, despite being the school where Mike Bobo had spent his playing career and much of his coaching career, was no longer the obvious destination for the Bobo family.

But that plan lasted less than two months.

Auburn fired Mike Bobo in November, leaving Drew Bobo to reconsider where he wanted to play college football. The coaching staff change came after Auburn finished 6-6 in the regular season and lost its final four games, including a 24-22 overtime loss to Alabama in the Iron Bowl.

The three-star offensive lineman flipped his commitment from Auburn to Georgia on Dec. 13, 2021. At the time, he told outlets that after his father's firing, they decided Auburn was no longer the best fit.

That decision brought Drew Bobo back to a place that had been part of his life long before he was a college football recruit.

Mike Bobo played quarterback at Georgia from 1994-97 and spent 14 seasons on the Bulldogs' coaching staff under head coach Mark Richt, including eight as offensive coordinator, and he was about to return between the hedges.

In January 2022, Georgia hired Mike Bobo as an offensive analyst. The move meant the father-and-son pair would be in Athens together, with Drew Bobo arriving as a member of Georgia's 2022 recruiting class.

"It's really cool for me to be able to play for my dad, who I've wanted to play for my whole life, and be at Georgia, where I've wanted to be my whole life," Drew Bobo said before the 2026 season.

However, his first few years in red and black were not an immediate payoff.

Drew Bobo redshirted in 2022 as Georgia went 15-0 and won its second consecutive national championship. Mike Bobo was part of that championship team as an analyst. In 2023, Drew Bobo appeared in six regular season games while continuing to work his way up the offensive line depth chart.

His father's role also changed. After spending the 2022 season as an analyst, Mike Bobo was promoted to Georgia's offensive coordinator in February 2023. He returned to the position he had held during his first stint in Athens, this time working for head coach Kirby Smart, his former Georgia teammate and longtime friend.

In fact, Drew Bobo was the ring bearer for the Smart wedding when he was just a few years old.

"To come back and have an opportunity to be there at the University of Georgia with him and under his leadership and the direction he sets every day, it's been a blessing for me and my family," Mike Bobo said in 2023 after working almost a full year under Smart.

Drew Bobo's first true opportunity finally came in 2024. With injuries affecting Georgia's offensive line, he made his first career start at center against Auburn. The matchup added another layer to an already unusual story: the Auburn High School graduate was now starting against the school he once planned to play for, while his father was calling the offense for the Bulldogs.

But his most memorable moment came in the SEC championship game against Texas, when he completed a nine-yard pass to Arian Smith on a fake punt to convert a fourth-and-5.

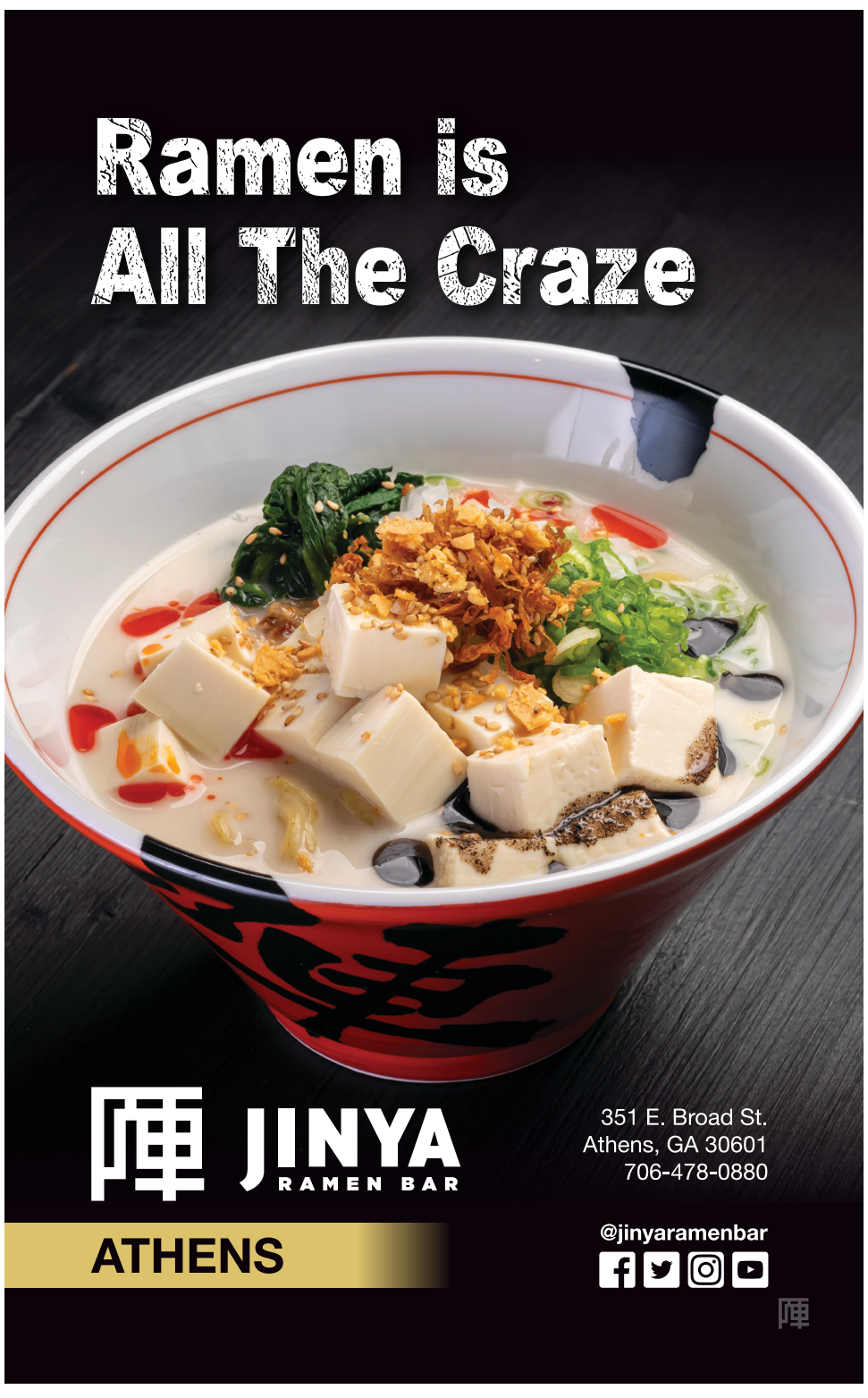
By 2025, the former three-star recruit had become a regular piece of Georgia's offensive line. He started 11 games and helped anchor an offense that averaged 32.1 points and 402.4 yards per game.

His path to the field was interrupted again late in 2025 when he suffered an injury to his left foot against Georgia Tech. The injury ended his season and required surgery, but he returned for the 2026 opener against Tennessee State. Now healthy, Drew Bobo provides veteran experience at center heading into another meeting with the Tigers.

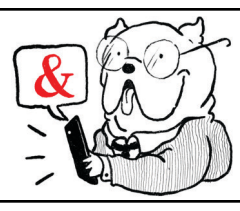
A fifth-year center this season, Drew Bobo was named to the preseason All-SEC first team by the conference's coaches.

Now, as Georgia prepares to face Auburn again, the flip that once looked like a recruiting footnote has become a full-circle story.

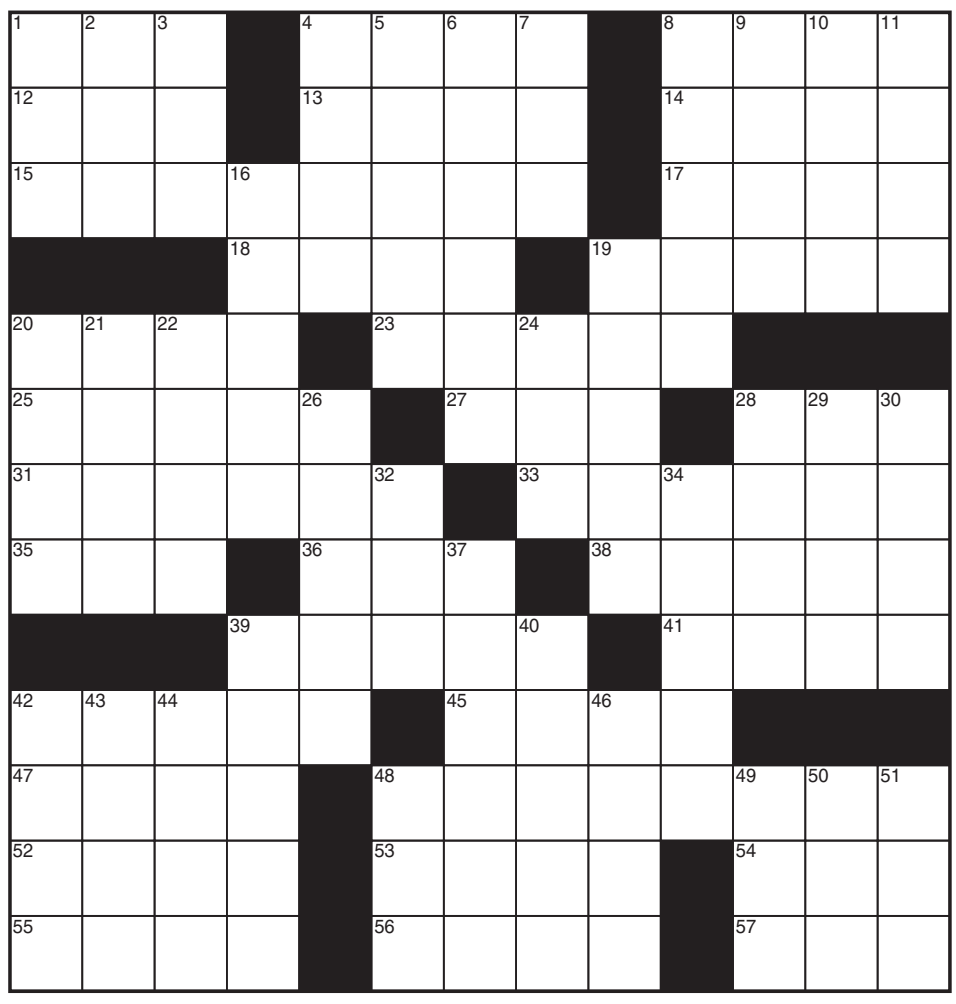




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Thursday Crossword - Answer Online FRIDAY, Oct. 16



ACROSS

1. Cribbage piece
4. Clear the field
8. Real howler
12. "Golden" time
13. Between assignments
14. Atlas stat
15. Overhaul, as a website
17. Battle remnant
18. Casino game
19. Vampire bane
20. Aircraft prefix
23. Lock horns
25. Shouldered
27. Barber's obstacle
28. Comic bit
31. Conundrum
33. First name in 60's pop
35. Pro ____ (for now)
36. Computers burn them
38. From out of town
39. Bowler's button
41. Diversion
42. Crow's home
45. Decree ender
47. It takes the cake?
48. Some sacraments
52. Fortify for action
53. Biblical book
54. Beech relative
55. Charity of a sort
56. Hamper heap
57. Broker's advice

DOWN

1. "As ____ your instructions"
2. Bard's "before"
3. Travel aimlessly
4. Swell
5. Patsy's "AbFab" pal
6. 2000 presidential candidate
7. Stock holder
8. Basket type
9. Sea predator
10. Pipe problem
11. Cab charge
16. ____ out a living
19. Less skeptical
20. Aid in crime
21. All's opposite
22. Tinsel, e.g.
24. Mountain pass
26. Roast host
28. Mentor
29. "Oh, woe!"
30. 7-10, on the Beaufort Scale
32. Airtime filler
34. City on the Po
37. Nero's tutor
39. Pulls apart
40. Salon treatments
42. Senate cover-up, once
43. Good competitor?
44. Short wave?
46. Band for Miss America
48. Boxer's foot
49. Corn refuse
50. ____ de Cologne
51. It may be the limit

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McKenna Edwards

Senior Editor of Guides & Magazines

Major:

Master's in journalism and mass communication

Position Description:

Oversee stories and visuals for special publications including the Visitor's Guide, Eat & Drink Guide and Housing Guide; update and fact-check; pitch new feature story ideas with assistant editor.

How has your coursework at Grady College prepared you for your role at The Red & Black?

My coursework at Grady prepared me for my role at The Red & Black through hands-on learning experiences in my reporting and photojournalism classes. My professors have been a huge help over the years, showing me ways to get involved in my career on and off campus.

What has been the most rewarding part of serving in a leadership role at The Red & Black?

The most rewarding part of serving in an editor role at The Red & Black has been the professional skills and confidence it has given me as a journalist.

At Grady College, we are proud of our students who learn the core values, ethics and skills of journalism in our classrooms, then apply them to writing and visualizing features in The Red & Black.
This is one in a series of profiles about our student leaders who serve The Red & Black.

Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication
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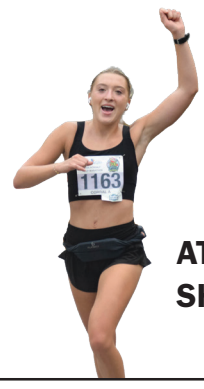


B4 A WORTHY WARRIOR
Mason Hall's journey

B7 CELEBRATING COMMUNITY
Hispanic Heritage Month

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B5 ATHHALF SHOWCASE

VOL. 134 | No. 7 | Athens, Georgia

Thursday, October 15, 2026



A Flock camera at the Bolton crosswalk on the University of Georgia campus in Athens, Georgia, on Monday, Sept. 28, 2026. PHOTO/ZACHARY KRAUSMAN

At what cost?

Flock cameras and the line between safety and privacy

Julia Beauchamp and Maia Popa

Kaden Vail, a junior and secretary of the University of Georgia Young Democrats, said, "What is the real reason there's a camera right there to track all these students' license plates?"

UGA students may have noticed the new Flock Safety cameras that were installed at the crosswalk across from UGA's Bolton Dining Commons this past summer.

This brought the total number to more than 20 on or around the UGA campus, according to DeFlock, an open-source project mapping Automated License Plate Readers (ALPRs) across the country.

Although the Athens-Clarke County Police Department (ACCPD) and University of Georgia Police Department (UGAPD) employ Flock cameras as a crime-fighting tool, many UGA students and Athens locals remain skeptical amidst a larger national debate about privacy concerns, mass surveillance and public safety.

Knowa Johnson, co-founder and marketing promotions director for the Athens Anti-Discrimination Movement (AADM), recognizes how Flock cameras can aid law enforcement authorities in tracking suspects and solving crimes. However, Johnson said AADM advocates for transparency and accountability through community input and regular audits.

"I just think about it as a family man. If somebody was physically following my wife, my children around Athens every day, we would call that disturbing," Johnson said. "So when technology does it, all of a sudden is it okay?"

Flock Safety is an Atlanta-based company that produces ALPRs that identify a vehicle's license plate and physical attributes such as make, model and color. Flock cameras capture a still-shot image of a vehicle as it passes into the camera's field of view, according to ACCPD.

CEO Garrett Langley, a graduate of the Georgia Institute of Technology, founded Flock Safety after his neighborhood was victimized by crime and realized that many families could not rely on their public safety system.

Recently, Flock has gained more attention after multiple instances of misuse throughout Georgia and the United States. While there is no official number, the Institute of Justice has identified over 100 cases of ALPR misuse through combining public records and documents.

Both ACCPD and UGAPD have reported instances of Flock ALPR misuse within the past two months, with ACCPD reporting a second termination in early October. Although both misuse cases have resulted in tighter policies regarding employee usage, such as limiting searches of the ALPR system to supervisors and higher, UGA and Athens locals alike have expressed concern about police transparency and government surveillance.

A police perspective

Deputy chief of ACCPD Harrison Daniel said that ACCPD recognizes the privacy concerns that Athens residents have expressed.

"There's a lot of value in the public safety aspect of solving crime, and what's important to us is making sure that we have appropriate guardrails in place to protect the privacy and the security of these systems and use them appropriately," Daniel said.

Daniel said ACCPD has been using Flock ALPR cameras since around 2017. Now, the department owns and operates 33 cameras, which were placed throughout Athens using predictive mapping based on crime hotspots.

UGA purchased and operates the Flock cameras on campus privately, according to Daniel. ACCPD and UGAPD collaborate on operating and accessing the cameras if needed for public safety measures.

The ACCPD utilizes a two-tiered auditing process to monitor Flock camera use by the department. The auditing system flags abnormal activities of Flock camera use for review. Police captains conduct reviews and confirm through additional means that the flagged activity was a legitimate use of the system.

Next, ACCPD's Office of Professional Standards reviews the process. The Office of Professional Standards also conducts a randomized inspection of all uses of the Flock system that occur in a quarter.

As a measure in response to misuse reported in October, only authorized ACCPD officers with the rank of supervisor and higher have current access to the Flock system.

SEE FLOCK CAMERA PAGE B3

The 62-year-old freshman

Rebecca Williams pursues her acting dreams

Louise Brophy

It takes a certain level of bravery to enroll in college straight out of high school, but it takes even more to enroll as a 62-year-old freshman. Rebecca Williams is pursuing a degree in theatre at the University of Georgia, although this is not the first time Williams has called herself a Bulldog.

Williams began her first freshman year at UGA in 1981 when she was just 17 years old, graduating with a degree in political science and journalism. More than 40 years later, she is back for more, but this time she is foregoing her original majors for the one she always wished she could pursue: theatre.

"I was very active in theatre when I was in high school, and it was really my love and my passion," Williams said. "I really wanted to major in theatre back then, but I had some well-meaning family members who loved me very much, but they just felt like this was going to be incredibly challenging."

This is not an uncommon line of thinking among theatre majors, as more than 60% of UGA theatre majors also pursue additional majors or degrees in other departments.

Trying to find her calling in a theatre-less field, Williams finished her first four years at UGA as a political science and broadcast journalism major, eventually discovering the creative performance aspect of being on camera.

"I worked as a television reporter and news anchor for about 15 years, and I loved it," Williams said. "It was everything I hoped it would be."

From there, she transitioned out of the newsroom and into the home as a stay-at-home-mom. Williams and her husband Scotty started their own production company, where she did voiceover work, modeling and script writing.

Yet, the stage never managed to fully leave her mind.

After glancing at the UGA Department of Theatre and Film website from time to time, she discovered that tuition is free in the University System of Georgia for students aged 62 and older who live in Georgia.

After finding her nearly 45-year-old transcript, Williams arrived back on campus for another first day of class.

"I was nervous the first day, I was like, 'What do I wear?'" Williams said. "I already felt like I was going to look a little out of place, and I had students even at orientation and the first day of school that would say, 'Oh, are you a professor? Are you a guest speaker?'"

Williams said that in one of her first big classes back at the university, she had to introduce herself to her peers and her professor. While she initially felt stressed, her fear melted away when students applauded after hearing her story.

"They made me feel so welcome, and that was such a turning point for me where I felt like 'Okay, they kind of get me,'" Williams said.

John Bray, a professor and director of graduate studies in the Department of Theatre and Film, certainly does 'get' Williams, as this is not the first time someone like her has joined his classroom.

"I have had returning students before, particularly those who are over the age of 60, and I think it's wonderful that UGA provides the opportunity for community members to come back and pursue a dream," Bray said.

SEE 62-YEAR-OLD FRESHMAN PAGE B3



Rebecca Williams poses for a portrait in the Fine Arts Theatre at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia, on Sept. 29, 2026. PHOTO/ZACHARY KRAUSMAN

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Athens after hours

Inside the local late-night food scene

Aster Marcos

Finding a place to eat in Athens after a late night downtown can be tough when most non-fast-food restaurants close before the night ends. For students, visitors and anyone else who are not ready to call it a night just yet, finding a place that still serves substantial meals at that time can make all the difference.

From sit-down dinners to casual late-night bites and drinks, these restaurants and bars offer options for people looking for something substantial long after the typical dinner rush.



From left, Newton Seamount, Ryder Sayers and Jacob Herlihy eat together at The Globe on Wednesday, Sept. 30, 2026, in downtown Athens, Georgia. Seamount, Sayers and Herlihy said they often eat late at The Globe for the atmosphere. PHOTO/SARAH ROPER

The Pine Bar

The Pine Bar is a cozy tapas spot with a lively atmosphere in the Five Points neighborhood that closes at 11 p.m. on Sundays, along with Tuesdays through Thursdays, and 12 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. The restaurant offers tapas, wood-fired oysters, cheese and charcuterie, wine and a full bar.

"The Pine is now the perfect late night spot for somebody who wants maybe something a little bit more subdued, a little bit more low-key and chill," Anna Riley, general manager of Pine Bar, said. "You can come in at 10, 11 o'clock and still get a big charcuterie board, a big cheese plate, some french fries and share a bottle of wine with your friends at a nice table in the lounge area."

According to Riley, the restaurant and bar is a "social house" where one can linger after hours and enjoy "good spirits, good wine and good food."

"It's a place you can go if you want to get dressed up with your girlfriends and you want to have a nice cute night, but it's also a place you can go if you're wearing your leggings and you just had a long day and you want to come hang out with someone," Maggie Petzelt, an admin at The Pine Bar, said.

"It's not a specific dress code or anything. It really is welcoming and all-encompassing. You're going to have great drinks, you're going to have great snacks, good conversations that you can actually hear."



The outside of The Pine Bar on Thursday, Oct. 1, 2026, in Five Points in Athens, Georgia. The Pine Bar is open until midnight on Fridays and Saturdays. PHOTO/SARAH ROPER

The Globe

The Globe is an English-European style pub and restaurant located in downtown Athens. The longtime establishment offers classic pub dishes and drinks in a warm, intimate space characterized by dark wood, bookshelves and vintage décor. The Globe offers a laid-back setting for those looking to extend their evening.

Aaron Hubbard, a bartender at The Globe, said he was surprised to learn that The Globe is one of the oldest bars in Athens, only opening in 1989.

"It's kind of stood the test of time, at least in the changing downtown Athens landscape, and you have a lot of groups of people who bring other people in," Hubbard said.

The Globe's kitchen is open every day from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Although its kitchen closes at 10 p.m., the restaurant continues to offer drinks and events until midnight Sundays through Thursdays and until 2 a.m. on weekends.

Osteria Olio

Osteria Olio is a modern upscale Italian restaurant located inside the historic Rivet House hotel. With an extensive menu, specialty cocktails and a warmly lit atmosphere, Osteria Olio offers a setting fit for celebrations, date nights or late dinners.

"The amount of people that we do have coming in here, especially on these game days who book reservations at 9 o'clock, 10 o' clock, even pushing 11 o'clock – they come in here and they are absolutely fantastic." Charles Walbrecher, a server at Osteria Olio, said. "It's so much different than the bustling times from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. The music gets a bit louder, service slows down a little bit, and I don't want to call it ethereal, but I will say ethereal."

Its later dinner hours allow diners to make reservations later in the evening, particularly on Fridays and Saturdays, when they close at 11 p.m. Customers who crave something cheesy but sentient can sit down and order antipastis, wood-fired pizzas and more, accompanied by their drinks of choice.

"I feel like we have a very good late night vibe with our little lights and the lighting [is] dim," Clara Sautre, an admin and private dining coordinator at Osteria Olio, said. "When you're here, you don't necessarily feel like you're necessarily in Athens, so it's a different experience at night."

While late-night dining options in Athens may be limited, these restaurants show that eating later does not always have to mean fast food, offering full meals, small bites and places to stay a little longer.



The spaghetti pomodoro at Osteria Olio on Friday, Oct. 2, 2026, in Athens, Georgia. The spaghetti pomodoro is a new dish at Osteria Olio that contains grilled shrimp and almond garlic chili crisp. PHOTO/SARAH ROPER

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Rebecca Williams poses for a portrait in the Fine Arts Theatre at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia, on Sept. 29, 2026. Williams plans to audition for a part in the spring performance of "The Importance of Being Earnest." PHOTO/ZACHARY KRAUSMAN

62-YEAR-OLD FRESHMAN FROM PAGE **B1**

Williams said that although her transition so far has been smooth, the nearly 40 years of changes on UGA's campus have had an impact.

"I had to get familiar with eLC and submitting things online, and that's very, very different," Williams said.

Although many things are different, Williams said some things are exactly as she remembers them.

"The Fine Arts Building looks exactly the same as it did," Williams said. "When I walked into that building for my first class, it was almost like going back in time. It smells the same. It looks the same. I love how they've kept the character of that building."

In terms of change within the classroom, Williams said the ways her professors engage with students and encourage collaboration is different.

"I feel like the teachers, at least the two teachers that I have, are engaging more with the students," Williams said. "We already have multiple group projects, and I think not only has it helped me meet other people but I'm learning as much from them as I am from the course material."

David Saltz, another one of Williams' professors in the Department of Theatre and Film, understands that the rest of his students are learning valuable lessons from her.

"I think for the other students to see, 'Woah, that passion does persist,' it is real, it's validating," Saltz said. "On the one hand, it's saying, 'Well, if I don't do this I may regret it; it's not like it's going to go away.' On the other hand, it's like it's never too late, which is really inspiring."

> "I think for the other students to see, 'Woah that passion does persist,' it is real, it's validating.
>
> **DAVID SALTZ** | PROFESSOR

Like many college students, Williams also has to find a work-life balance. Specifically, she has to add her job as owner of a production company and a photo company, along with event planning, to the mix.

"I use an index card system, and I have all of these tabs with, like, 'Okay, here's school, here's our business, here's home, here's personal things,'" Williams said. "I literally go through those cards every morning and look at them and go, 'I'm going to pull two things out of each one of these, and that's what gets done today.'"

But without her loved ones by her side, even that organization system would not be enough to maintain a proper work-school-life balance.

"My husband, my daughter they've always been incredibly supportive," Williams said.

Williams said her daughter brought her to the bookstore, to buy a new backpack and to the dining hall. Her husband has helped quiz her and looked over her study guide to make sure she was "good to go."

Her family, however, is not the only thing that pushed Williams to reclaim her status as a student Bulldog; she first had to recover from something far scarier than the college application process.

Williams was diagnosed with breast cancer two years ago, and she said that diagnosis strengthened her commitment to living life without holding back.

Williams is certainly not holding back. She has already 'called the Dawgs,' watched from Sanford Stadium's student section on gameday, has plans to visit her old sorority house and even hopes to audition for UGA Theatre's spring production of "The Importance of Being Earnest."

"Until you put yourself out there, you are not going to know what you're capable of," Williams said. "There are times I don't even feel my age when I'm sitting in class, because I'm like 'Yeah, I can do this!'"



Rachel Atkinson, a local homeowner in Athens, poses for a portrait in front of her home on Friday, Oct. 2, 2026, in Athens, Georgia. Atkinson has seen progression of Flock cameras in the past years. PHOTO/LILY KATE AKINS

FLOCK CAMERA FROM PAGE **B1**

"We hold our people accountable. No different than if it's a crime or anything else," ACCPD Chief of Police Jerry Saulters said. "We're quick to ensure that we have policies and practices and other things in place that if we see somebody doing something wrong, we're going to address it."

The data collected from the Flock cameras are the property of ACCPD — data that, according to Daniel, is erased from the system after a 30-day period. The ACCPD shares data collected from Flock cameras with UGA, agencies within Georgia and some agencies in neighboring states.

Daniel said non-neighboring state agencies must request access to the data gathered by ACCPD-operated Flock cameras. ACCPD evaluates whether the request encompasses a legitimate law enforcement concern or operation.

Saulters confirmed that ACCPD does not share data gathered from Flock cameras with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

He said ACCPD has used APLR cameras to identify suspects and solve crimes in various instances — for example, the department used ALPR cameras to track the vehicle of the suspects later charged with the 2024 murder of 3-year-old Kyron Santino Zarco Smith.

A local view

Rachel Atkinson has been an Athens resident for 15 years and has seen the progression of Flock cameras.

"I think from a larger public safety standpoint, I really think I could actually argue from both sides," Atkinson said.

She said she recognizes the advantages of Flock cameras for law enforcement, as ALPRs provide evidence through high-resolution images of vehicles in the event of accidents and crimes. She also acknowledged the lack of expectation of privacy in public.

"There is this kind of implicit agreement that if you go out in public, there is an awareness that your person can be filmed without your knowledge because there's no right to privacy in public," Atkinson said.

However, Atkinson highlighted concerns over the management and usage of ALPR data.

"Who has the accountability? Who has the oversight? And that is the part where we say police or law enforcement," Atkinson said. "Does that mean a police officer who's upset at his ex-girlfriend can access Flock to figure out where she is and where she's been and where she's going? That is a gross overstepping of authority."

Atkinson said she does not expect transparency with the public from ACCPD. She said she has seen a pattern of officers who have engaged in misconduct be transferred rather than be fired or held accountable. She described it as "saving face."

"I do not automatically assume that they are telling us everything [or] that they are telling us what is in our best interest to know," Atkinson said.

> "Who has the accountability? Who has the oversight? And that is the part where we say police or law enforcement.
>
> **RACHEL ATKINSON** | ATHENS RESIDENT

Politics enters the debate

Both Republicans and Democrats across the nation have criticized the use of the cameras. Democratic U.S. Sen. Raphael Warnock of Georgia called for federal guardrails on potential misuse of Flock cameras and other ALPRs. Republican Georgia Sen. John Albers joined a law enforcement task force to address rising concerns over Flock misuse.

Vail said Flock cameras open a "Pandora's box" of surveillance.

"There's never been a more important time to vote for your local representatives, because they, at the end of the day, are the ones that sign contracts and approve and budget for Flock cameras," Vail said.

Thomas Chambers, a master's student and state secretary of College Republicans at UGA, said the primary issue around Flock cameras is finding a balance between freedom and security.

"I think there's a middle ground where the correct solution here is to eliminate what is violating people's freedoms," Chambers said. "At the same time, it's way more complex than, 'Oh we need to remove all Flock cameras.'"

Atkinson said she views the ongoing debate about Flock cameras within the larger context of preserving personal liberty as technology evolves.

"We're just living in a different era, and so I think it is the question of how do we engage with this in a really thoughtful, intelligent way," Atkinson said. "Asking questions and having public discourse is really important to that."



Oconee County tight end Mason Hall (86) carries the ball during a game against Cherokee Bluff at Warrior Stadium in Watkinsville, Georgia, on Friday, Oct. 2, 2026. Oconee County won 24-21. PHOTO/BENJAMIN JACOBSTEIN

Leveling up

Mason Hall leaves lasting legacy at Oconee County High School

Justin Schneeberger

As Mason Hall's football career at Oconee County High School comes to a close, he will soon begin another chapter when he arrives at Virginia as a three-star tight end recruit.

Before Hall received interest from major Power Four programs, his father and Warriors head coach Ben Hall recognized his son's potential to play at the next level early in his high school career.

"I saw early on," Hall said. "[I could tell] in ninth and 10th grade he would have an opportunity. To what level? I didn't know."

Early in high school, Hall was a multisport athlete, playing football and basketball and using skills from both sports to benefit his play. He led the basketball team in points as a junior, but football was always the focus of his athletic career, especially after his sophomore year.

"I'd always taken it serious whenever I was in middle school and high school, and then whenever I got my first offer, I think it was my sophomore year," Mason Hall said. "That's when I really realized I had to lock in, put on weight and make it the main focus."

Since then, he has recorded 58 receptions and 736 receiving yards during his sophomore year and followed it up with another 43 catches for 625 yards as a junior.

On top of his receiving ability, Hall became one of the most reliable blockers for the Warriors and brought even more versatility to the team this year by playing other roles such as running back, long snapper and punter. He currently leads the team in receiving yards per game, is third on the team in rushing yards per game and has even hauled in an interception.

His production reflected the work he put in, and his impact on the team extended beyond his own play.

"He'll invite one of the freshmen to work out, just because he knows that freshman could be starting on a varsity field someday soon," teammate Gavin Bray said.

Hall's parents taught him from an early age to remain humble and build relationships with others, and he has remained the same way in high school. Aside from watching film and lifting with teammates, he golfs, goes to church and attends middle school football games with his teammates.

He has also spent time with the community, including at Oconee County High School's annual Victory Day on Sept. 21, where kids with disabilities experience Friday Night Lights alongside the varsity football players.

Hall has formed valuable relationships in high school, and establishing a rapport with people was one of the key factors in picking which college to commit to. Weighing the options that were in front of him, he not only looked at each school's football program, but also its academics — as he plans to study business — and the social life each had to offer. Taking each factor into consideration, Hall announced his decision to commit to Virginia on June 9.

"It was just a perfect mix of everything between football, academics, the coaching staff, the facilities, the social life at the school," he said.

As Hall moves on to the next level, his teammates and coaches know what kind of player and person the Cavaliers are getting.

"He'll work hard," Bray said. "I'm pretty sure he's got close to a 4.0 GPA, and then on the field they're getting a guy who'll come in and try to work and compete for a spot as a freshman, just like he did in high school."

Although Hall's absence will be felt at Oconee County High School, he leaves behind a legacy that will inspire the next generation of Warriors to follow in his footsteps.



Oconee County tight end Mason Hall (86) during a game against Cherokee Bluff at Warrior Stadium in Watkinsville, Georgia, on Friday, Oct. 2, 2026. Oconee County won 24-21. PHOTO/BENJAMIN JACOBSTEIN





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Highlights from AthHalf 2026















PHOTO/BRIELLE LOGAN

OPINION Your vote matters, and so do the midterms

As an election approaches, an opportunity awaits

Josefine Vitriol



GRAPHIC/JACK HESPRICH

Election season is just around the corner, and it's that time of the year when, as an eligible United States citizen, you have the opportunity to freely exercise your civic right to vote.

One U.S. Senate seat will be up for election in Georgia in 2026. Additionally, the Georgia governor, attorney general and secretary of state positions will be on the ballot, along with other local seats, including one in the U.S. House for Georgia's 10th Congressional District. It is a big year for Georgia voters, and now more than ever, it is of the utmost importance that you get out and vote.

But what happens when the people who have the power to create change in their community choose not to? A foundational principle of democracy is that power resides with the people. This message is taught in many basic civics classes in the U.S., yet over 18 million registered voters did not cast a ballot in the 2024 presidential election. If this number does not seem shocking enough, consider what that looks like in practice.

According to the Center for American Progress, over 85 U.S. Senate elections from 1976 to 2021 were decided by less than 3% of all votes cast. The same principle applied to House elections — from 1976 to 2022, over 410 U.S. House elections were decided by votes within the same margin.

This phenomenon can occur even in the case of national presidential elections. Donald Trump won the 2024 election by 1.5 points to secure his second-term presidency. The minuteness of these numbers shows how tight election margins often are. If less than 3% of votes cast can be all that it takes to sway an election for the U.S. Congress, why aren't more Americans voting?

One of the key contributors is how you were raised — if your parents are not habitual voters, it is unlikely you will be yourself. Education also plays a large role. College graduates are much more likely to vote, having the ability to absorb and understand political information better than most. Many young U.S. citizens are unregistered completely. All this contributes to the continuous lack of habitual voter representation and participation.

There are many reasons that people periodically vote, refrain from voting or never register at all. But if more people understood how small of a margin can dictate who becomes a member of our Congress, the power of voting, even in the often-neglected midterm elections would become clear.

I have been interested in politics for quite some time. But when I got to college and actually started studying political science, I remember how small I felt. It seemed like the more I learned, the more my sense of apathy grew. No one was willing to talk to one another, and there was so much vitriol surrounding politics that it felt like there was nothing I could ever do that would actually make a difference.

Can a single person like you or me change the world? Not always. What we can do is take small actions to build the future that we want. I feel that the easiest thing I can do to help influence change in my community is to vote for legislators who I think would best support them.

Having a say in who represents you is a privilege that should not be taken for granted. As Americans, we have the opportunity to choose who represents us as individuals. But that ability loses its power when we choose not to use it. A vote only has power if it is cast.

The baseline is this: if you are unhappy with your government, vote. If you want to see people who look like you in office, vote. If you have an opinion, vote. If you are happy with the way things are, vote. If you want to see a change, vote. If you don't know what you want from your government, educate yourself — and then vote.

If given the chance, why not contribute?

Josefine Vitriol is a junior journalism and political science major at the University of Georgia.

STUDENT VOICES

UGA students share favorite organizations on campus

Matthew Carr, Photos: Josh Mui

As one of the biggest universities in the nation, the University of Georgia is full of a wide range of opportunities. With more than 800 registered student organizations on campus, it may feel tough to find the ones calling you — but keep searching, because once you do, the rewards often reverberate throughout your college years and beyond.

Research shows a positive correlation between student involvement and academic performance. A study by Purdue University says that for undergraduate students, student organization participation can contribute to the development of social and leadership skills, higher satisfaction in college and further success beyond college.

With all the social and academic advantages that come with involvement in on-campus organizations, it is clear why they are so popular among the student body at UGA, which was recently ranked among the best colleges for student life by Niche.

The Red & Black asked students to share what their favorite on-campus organizations are.



Cash Bluestone

JUNIOR MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS MAJOR

"I really like the club cross country and track team," Bluestone said. "I just think it's a really cool organization. I met a lot of really good friends there, and I think it just brings people together that are interested in running really well, and it's open to all skill levels. Anyone can come and hang out and run and it's really fun."



Anvitha Battu

FRESHMAN MECHANICAL ENGINEERING MAJOR

"My favorite student organization is the Arch Policy Institute," Battu said. "We seem to be working towards a really cool cause, compiling information about policy and then presenting it at the end of the year to county officials at Athens-Clarke County meetings. So I'm super excited to work with like-minded people towards something greater."



Daniela Botello

SOPHOMORE INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS MAJOR

"My favorite organization would probably be The Catholic Center because of the different ministries they have, like Seeking Water, Ignite, Ablaze and all of the Sunday night dinners. I just get to meet a whole bunch of new people within the same faith," Botello said.



Noah Brill

JUNIOR BIOCHEMISTRY AND MOLECULAR BIOLOGY MAJOR

"I'm a member of the Redcoat Band. I just love being a part of the Redcoats. I think it's a great group of people, and I just have a lot of fun representing the university," Brill said.



Edwin Sanchez dances with Danza Azteca at the 17th annual LatinFest in Athens, Georgia on Saturday, Sept. 19, 2026. The event featured food, clothing and accessories vendors, organizations and live performances to celebrate Latin American countries and cultures. PHOTO/EVAN FRILINGOS

Edwin Sanchez danza con Danza Azteca en la 17ª edición anual del LatinFest en Athens, Georgia, el sábado 19 de septiembre de 2026. El evento ofreció vendedores de comida, ropa y accesorios, organizaciones y actuaciones en vivo para celebrar los países y las culturas de América Latina. FOTO/EVAN FRILINGOS



Lidia Trigueros poses for a photo in front of an El Salvador flag at the 17th annual LatinFest in Athens, Georgia on Saturday, Sept. 19, 2026. The event celebrated Latin American countries and cultures. PHOTO/EVAN FRILINGOS

Lidia Trigueros posa para un retrato en frente de la bandera de El Salvador en la 17ª edición anual del LatinFest en Athens, Georgia, el sábado 19 de septiembre de 2026. El evento celebró los países y las culturas de América Latina. FOTO/EVAN FRILINGOS

De LatinFest a Noche Latina

UGA y Athens celebran el Mes de la Herencia Hispana

Lexie Shadix, Traducción: Genesis Maestre-Ruperto

El Mes de la Herencia Hispana está llegando a su fin en la Universidad de Georgia y en el área de Athens. Este mes, desde el 15 de septiembre hasta el 15 de octubre, celebra la historia de comunidades Hispanas y Latinas y sus impactos en los Estados Unidos.

Varios días de independencia de países Centroamericanos caen en el tiempo del Mes de la Herencia Hispana, incluyendo a Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras y Nicaragua, todos el 15 de septiembre, seguido por México el 16 de septiembre, Chile el 18 de septiembre y Belize el 21 de septiembre.

La celebración data del 1968, cuando el Presidente Lyndon B. Johnson estableció la Semana Nacional de la Herencia Hispana. 20 años después, en 1988, el Presidente Ronald Reagan firmó una ley que extendió la semana a una celebración que duraría un mes que se reconoce hoy.

"El Mes de la Herencia Hispana nos da la oportunidad a traer a luz las contribuciones de [la gente] de Latinoamérica y el Caribe en una manera más doméstica … y cuál han sido sus roles específicamente en la evolución de pensamiento nacional, entrenamiento nacional [y] tradiciones literarias nacionales", dijo Chad Howe, el director provisional de UGA's Latin American and Caribbean Studies Institute (LACSI).

Athens inició sus festividades locales el 19 de septiembre con el festival annual LatinFest. Presentado por Dignidad Inmigrante, el festival duró todo el día y llenó a Washington Street con bailes vivos, música y comida.

Organizaciones estudiantiles y programas universitarios presentaron sus propias celebraciones. Entre estos grupos hay La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity, Inc. (LUL), Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority, Inc. y GALEO - una organización sin fines de lucro con el objetivo de aumentar el compromiso cívico entre la comunidad Latina.

Los grupos han coleccionado libros durante el mes. Los libros, los cuales incluyen libros de niño, joven adulto, ficción, no ficción, inglés y español, serán donados a Little Free Libraries en la comunidad de Atlanta.

LUL también se juntaron con el Hispanic Student Association para presentar Una Noche de Baile en Memorial Hall en 29 de septiembre, donde los instructores Elián Fabbrini y Lyzsania Badillo enseñaron baile de Bachata y de Salsa. Estos eventos proveen visibilidad en una institución predominante blanco (PWI).

En UGA, solamente casi 7.7% de estudiantes de bachillerato son Hispanos, y este porcentaje se baja más para estudiantes de maestría, a solamente 5.7%, según el College Factual.

"La población pequeña que tenemos es una población bien fuerte porque… están bien orgullosos de donde vienen", dijo Iván Mendoza, el presidente y coordinador de relaciones públicas de LUL.

Mendoza dijo que estos espacios pueden proveer un sentido de pertenencia para estudiantes minoritarios en un campus grande.

"Cuando estás unido y … saliendo y apoyando los unos a los otros, ese sentido de asimilación, ese sentido de no tener pertenencia, se desaparece", dijo Mendoza. "Cuando tienes orgullo de donde viniste, todas las cosas externas desaparecen, y tú puedes sentir orgullo de ti y tu herencia y tu cultura.

Aunque el mes está terminando, las celebraciones todavía están ocurriendo en el campus. El Hispanic Student Association va a presentar su Noche Latina, la conmemoración anual de la asociación, el sábado, 24 de octubre.

El evento presenta un aspecto diferente de la cultura Hispana y Latina cada año, teniendo comida, arte y música. Este año el tema es "Lugares de Memoria", que refleja "un sentido de nostalgia y amor" por el pasado, según la cuenta de Instagram del HSA Noche Latina.

"Es bien impresionante el trabajo que pone hacía ese evento", dijo Jorge Depric, el director asistente de LACSI. "Yo pienso que es uno de los eventos más interesantes aquí en el campus durante este mes".

"Los organizadores esperan que el impacto de estos eventos dure más que la venta federal. Para Mendoza, el objetivo final es traer unidad a UGA.

"Nosotros traemos a muchos Latinos, pero nuestro objetivo principal es unir a todo el mundo en el campus, y a traer a todo el mundo junto durante el Mes de la Herencia Hispana, o tal vez cuando no es el Mes de la Herencia Hispana", dijo Mendoza.

Visit redandblack.com for more Spanish-translated ournalism.



Elián Fabbrini and Lyzsania Badillo lead during Una Noche de Baile at Memorial Hall Ballroom in Athens, Georgia on Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2026. La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity, Inc. and the Hispanic Student Association held a night of dancing where attendees learned Bachata and Salsa. PHOTO/EVAN FRILINGOS

Elián Fabbrini y Lyzsania Badillo bailan durante Una Noche de Baile en Memorial Hall Ballroom en Athens, Georgia, el martes 29 de septiembre de 2026. La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity, Inc. y la Hispanic Student Association hicieron una noche de baile en la cual los estudiantes aprendieron bachata y salsa. FOTO/EVAN FRILINGOS

From LatinFest to Noche Latina

UGA and Athens celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month

Lexie Shadix

Hispanic Heritage Month is wrapping up at the University of Georgia and across the Athens area. The month, running from Sept. 15 to Oct. 15, celebrates the history of Hispanic and Latino communities and their impact on the United States.

Many Central American countries' independence days fall within the timeframe of Hispanic Heritage Month, including Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua on Sept. 15, followed by Mexico on Sept. 16, Chile on Sept. 18 and Belize on Sept. 21.

The celebration dates back to 1968, when President Lyndon B. Johnson established National Hispanic Heritage Week. 20 years later, in 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed a law that expanded the week to the month-long celebration recognized today.

"Hispanic Heritage Month gives us the opportunity to highlight the contributions of Latin American [and] Caribbean [people] in a more domestic way … and what their roles have been specifically in the evolution of national thinking, national entertainment [and] national literary traditions," Chad Howe, the interim director of UGA's Latin American and Caribbean Studies Institute (LACSI), said.

Athens kicked off its local festivities on Sept. 19 with the 17th annual LatinFest. Hosted by Dignidad Inmigrante, the all-day festival filled Washington Street with live dancing, music and street food.

Student organizations and university programs hosted their own celebrations. Among these groups are La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda Fraternity, Inc. (LUL), Lambda Theta Alpha Latin Sorority, Inc. and GALEO – a nonprofit aimed at increasing civic engagement among the Latino community.

The groups have collected books throughout the month. The books, which include children's, young adult, fiction and nonfiction, in English and Spanish, will be donated to Little Free Libraries throughout the Atlanta community.

LUL also partnered with the Hispanic Student Association to host Una Noche de Baile at Memorial Hall on Sept. 29, where instructors Elián Fabbrini and Lyzsania Badillo taught Bachata and Salsa dancing.

These events provide visibility at a predominantly white institution (PWI). At UGA, only about 7.7% of undergraduate students are Hispanic, and this percentage drops even lower for graduate students, at just 5.7%, according to College Factual

"The small population that we have is a very strong population because … they're very proud of where they come from," Ivan Mendoza, president and public relations chair of LUL, said.

Mendoza said that these spaces can provide a sense of belonging for minority students in a large campus.

"When you're united and … coming out and supporting each other, that sense of assimilation, that sense of not fitting in, just kind of disappears," Mendoza said. "When you're proud of where you come from, all the external stuff disappears, and you can just have you and your heritage and your culture to be proud of."

Although the month is ending, celebrations are still occurring on campus. The Hispanic Student Association will host its Noche Latina, the association's yearly commemoration, on Saturday, Oct. 24.

The event showcases a different aspect of Hispanic and Latino culture each year, featuring food, art and music. This year's theme is "Lugares de Memoria," which reflects "a sense of nostalgia and love" for the past, according to the HSA Noche Latina Instagram account.

"It's really impressive the work that they put into this," Jorge Derpic, the assistant director of LACSI, said. "I think that's one of the most interesting events here on campus during this month."

Organizers hope the impact of these events outlasts the federally designated window. For Mendoza, the ultimate goal is to bring unity to UGA.

"We do bring in a lot of Latinos, but our main goal is to unite everybody on campus, and to bring everybody together during Hispanic Heritage Month, or whether it's not Hispanic Heritage Month," Mendoza said.



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