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GEORGIA VS. VANDERBILT

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HOME
BETWEEN THE HEDGES



Georgia defensive backs Demello Jones (8) and KJ Bolden (4) during a game against Oklahoma at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Sept. 26, 2026. Georgia won 41-13. PHOTO/EVAN FRILINGOS

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A familiar foe

The history of Vanderbilt vs. Georgia

Ryan Erdossy

Four games into a 2026 season where Georgia has faced a few unfamiliar opponents, the Bulldogs will finally meet a familiar foe between the hedges.

Georgia and Vanderbilt have played 83 times in history. The first matchup came in 1893, with the two programs meeting periodically throughout the early years of the series. The Commodores won the first meeting 35-0 and dominated the early history of the matchup.

The SEC was founded in December 1932, bringing Georgia and Vanderbilt together as conference opponents. However, after their meeting that year, the two teams did not meet again for another two decades. The Great Depression and World War II brought financial pressures and travel restrictions that influenced college football scheduling, contributing to the long gap between the Bulldogs and Commodores.

The series became an annual matchup beginning in 1968. Georgia and Vanderbilt played every season through 2023, with the exception of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic altered the SEC schedule. After a three-year drought, the Bulldogs and Commodores will meet again in Athens.

The series heavily favors Georgia, standing at 61-20-2 with a 31-7 advantage at home. The Bulldogs currently hold a six-game win streak against the Commodores.

2016: Vanderbilt 17, Georgia 16

Vanderbilt's last victory against Georgia came in 2016 during Kirby Smart's inaugural season as head coach. The upset eased pressure on Vanderbilt head coach Derek Mason, as he registered a road win over a conference opponent for the first time in three years at the helm.

The Bulldogs dominated statistically, outgaining the Commodores 421 to 171. A special teams blunder on the opening kickoff allowed Vanderbilt's Darrius Sims to return it 95 yards. The return set up a 1-yard touchdown for running back Ralph Webb, giving the Commodores an early advantage. Georgia tallied points of its own, scoring a touchdown and adding three field goals. With 14 minutes remaining, the Bulldogs led 16-10. On the next drive, Vanderbilt found the end zone, moving 75 yards in eight plays to flip the score.



Georgia running back Kendall Milton (2) runs with the ball during a game against Vanderbilt at FirstBank Stadium in Nashville, Tennessee, on Saturday, Oct. 14, 2023. Georgia won 37-20. PHOTO/MADY MERTENS



Georgia running back Daijun Edwards (30) runs with the ball during a game against Vanderbilt and Georgia at FirstBank Stadium in Nashville, Tennessee, on Saturday, Oct. 14, 2023. Georgia won 37-20. PHOTO/MADY MERTENS

Georgia fought to take the lead on its final drive, converting a fourth-and-13 with a 23-yard strike to Terry Godwin. When faced with fourth-and-1, the Bulldogs pitched the ball to receiver Isaiah McKenzie rather than handing it off to running backs Nick Chubb or Sony Michel. Linebacker Zach Cunningham made the game-winning play, tackling McKenzie a yard short of the first-down, ending the drive and sealing the Commodores' surprise win.

2021: Georgia 62, Vanderbilt 0

Although the Bulldogs have won every matchup against the Commodores since 2016, the largest margin of victory came in 2021.

The No. 2-ranked Bulldogs led 35-0 after the first quarter in Nashville, Tennessee. Offensively, Georgia recorded 532 yards to Vanderbilt's mere 77 yards. JT Daniels, who was banged up from a strained oblique muscle, completed 9 of 10 passes in the first quarter for two touchdowns and 129 yards.

Daniels was replaced by Stetson Bennett IV to begin the second quarter. Bennett led the way passing for 151 yards, going 11 of 15 and tacking on a score.

The game had ensuing effects on the season. Daniels' lingering injury forced him to miss subsequent games, opening the door for Bennett to take over the starting role. Bennett seized the opportunity leading Georgia to back-to-back national championships.

Five different offensive players rushed for over 30 yards for Georgia, contributing to the 241 total rushing yards. Vanderbilt completed five of 18 pass attempts for 24 yards, and to make the bleeding worse, the Commodores turned the ball over three times, throwing two interceptions and fumbling once.

Brock Bowers scored three touchdowns, becoming the first player since Todd Gurley in 2013 to score a receiving and rushing touchdown in the first quarter.

2023: Georgia 37, Vanderbilt 20

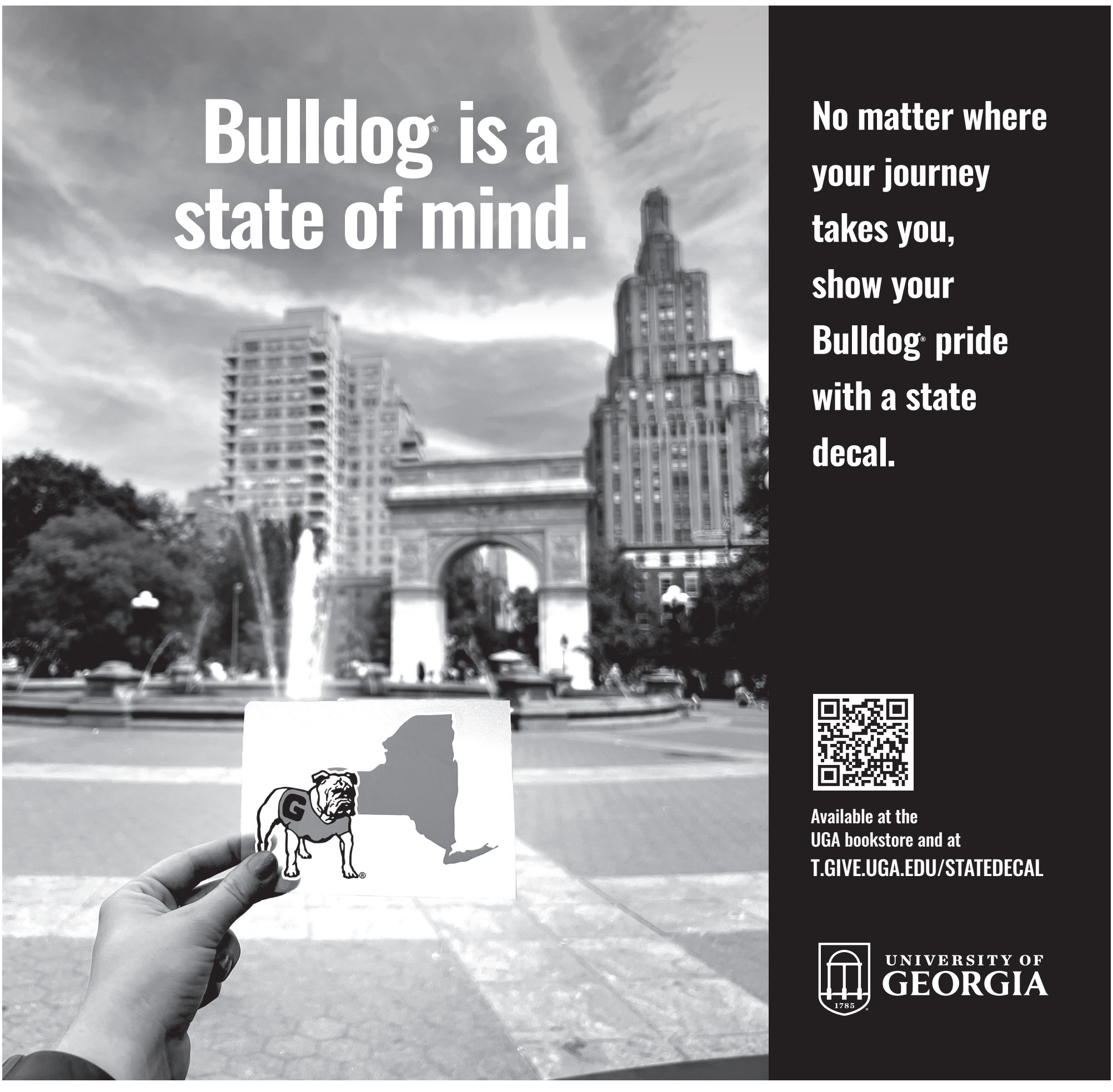
The last time Georgia and Vanderbilt met, the Commodores gave the Bulldogs an early scare on home turf.

Vanderbilt opened the game with a 49-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Ken Seals to wide receiver London Humphreys, putting Georgia behind from the start. The Bulldogs struggled to answer on their opening possession when the Commodores forced quarterback Carson Beck to fumble, giving the Commodores the ball at the Georgia 32-yard line.

With an opportunity to extend its early lead, Vanderbilt was instead turned away. Georgia's defense forced a three-and-out, and the Commodores missed the ensuing field goal attempt.

That proved to be a turning point. Georgia scored 27 consecutive points and pulled away for a 37-20 victory, extending its school-record winning streak to 24 games, the longest active streak at the time. Georgia once again heavily outgained Vanderbilt — 542 to 219 — with running back Daijun Edwards leading the Bulldogs on the ground with 146 rushing yards and a touchdown.

When Vanderbilt returns to Athens for the first time in four years Saturday, it will look to reverse its recent struggles against the Bulldogs, while Georgia looks to improve to 5-0 with another win against a team that has not given it much trouble in a decade.





Georgia head coach Kirby Smart speaks after a football game against Oklahoma at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Sept. 26, 2026. Georgia won 41-13. PHOTO/EVAN FRILINGOS

Staying home

Georgia looks to win again in Athens in contest with Vanderbilt

Ben Kule

No. 2 Georgia football will play its second consecutive home SEC game Saturday, looking to stay undefeated against Vanderbilt, which is playing its second straight road game and needs to right the ship after its 21-15 loss to Auburn.

The Bulldogs are still looking to build their resume but have done all they can do to this point, handling their first four opponents and most recently dominating Oklahoma in the Sooners' first ever trip to Sanford Stadium, 41-13.

Meanwhile, the perception of the unranked Commodores has diminished some from last season, when the team went 10-2 and just barely missed the College Football Playoff.

Vanderbilt head coach Clark Lea impressively turned the program around in a short time, improving what was a two-win team in 2023 to its best record in program history in a mere two seasons. The Commodores defeated five top-20 teams in the last two campaigns, most notably recording one of the biggest upsets in SEC history by stunning No. 1 Alabama 40-35 in Week 6 of 2024.

Yet its significant roster overhaul in the offseason, specifically the departure of Heisman Trophy-candidate quarterback Diego Pavia, puts Vanderbilt at risk of returning to its old ways. With the Commodores opening as 23.5-point underdogs against Georgia, the signs do not point towards another all-time upset.

Fast vs. slow start

Even though its best win so far has come against an Oklahoma team that had already tumbled out of the rankings before its trip to Athens, Georgia's season is off to a near-dream start.

The Bulldogs blew through their first two opponents, defeating Tennessee State 63-3 in one of their most dominant season openers ever, then tying a program-record 49 points in one half in an equally dominant 70-20 victory over Western Kentucky.

Georgia had to leave home just once through the first five weeks, handling Arkansas with little trouble and allowing just three points in the first three quarters of the 45-17 win. Last week, the Bulldogs took advantage of four Oklahoma turnovers – one of which was an 85-yard Chris Cole fumble recovery touchdown – to win with ease against the Sooners despite missing star running back Nate Frazier.

On the other hand, while a 3-1 record that includes a Power Four win might not seem so bad, Vanderbilt's start leaves much to be desired.

Against its two non-Power Four opponents to start the season, Vanderbilt was unconvincing in both games. The Commodores started with a 28-9 victory over Austin Peay, scoring only three touchdowns, then showed defensive woes in a 35-26 win over Delaware. In those two games, senior quarterback Blaze Berlowitz lost the starting job to Jared Curtis, a true freshman who spent 14 total months committed to the Bulldogs before a surprise flip to Vanderbilt in December.

In its next clash against NC State, Vanderbilt benefited from one of the strangest endings to a game in recent memory.

Leading by three and in possession of the ball on a fourth down in the final seconds, the Wolfpack would have almost certainly secured a win by simply punting or surrendering a safety as time expired. They attempted the latter, but a disastrous fumble in NC State's own end zone lifted the Commodores to a miraculous win.

A similar stroke of luck was nowhere to be found at Jordan-Hare Stadium, as Auburn conceded just one touchdown to doom Vanderbilt to its first loss of 2026.

Trouble between the hedges

Since head coach Kirby Smart took over ahead of the 2016 season, Sanford Stadium has been one of the hardest places in the country for visitors to win — and for Vanderbilt, which has spent much of its time in the SEC as conference bottom-feeders, that trend has been especially apparent.

Georgia is a dominant 61-20-2 against Vanderbilt all-time, with an even more commanding record of 31-7 at home. Since 2010, the Commodores have come to Athens six times, and all but one trip ended in blowout fashion.

During Smart's first season at the helm when the Bulldogs went just 8-5, Smart's worst record by winning percentage during his tenure at Georgia, the Bulldogs lost to Vanderbilt 17-16, picking up just three points on its final four drives.

Georgia's offense was too much for the Commodores to handle in every other meeting in that span, as the Bulldogs put up 40 or more points in all five other meetings. Vanderbilt's most recent trip to Athens in 2022 was one of the worst beatdowns in matchup history — a 55-point shutout win in favor of the Bulldogs.

While Vanderbilt's wins in Athens have been few and far between, most teams can relate. Georgia has become mightier than ever on its own turf, losing just one of its last 41 contests at Sanford Stadium. Alabama snapped Georgia's recent 33-game home winning streak, but Vanderbilt will have a much taller task if it wants to be the one to end the Bulldogs' new seven-game streak.

Game can hinge on running backs

Georgia has a rich history of elite running backs, and its 2026 group is no different. Headlined by Frazier, the Bulldogs have the fourth-most rushing yards in the SEC through four games. Frazier is the team leader with 202 rushing yards and five touchdowns, despite not playing against Oklahoma due to injury. In his absence, Chauncey Bowens rushed for two more scores, bringing his total for the season to five, and Dwight Phillips Jr. recorded career highs in carries and rushing yards against the Sooners while also recording a 54-yard touchdown.

Just as impressive as the Bulldogs' ability to run the ball has been their ability to stop the run. Georgia has allowed the second-least rushing yards in the conference, and has especially wreaked havoc behind the line of scrimmage with an impressive 26 team tackles for loss.

While Georgia's run defense has been stout, it will face likely its most dangerous opposing running back yet in Week 5: Sedrick Alexander.

Alexander tallied 767 all-purpose yards and 15 touchdowns in 2025, and was one of the most crucial returning players for the Commodores. A red zone threat as both a rusher and pass catcher out of the backfield, Alexander finished the regular season with a career day, going for 115 yards and three scores on just 10 carries against Tennessee.

The Bulldogs have not allowed a single running back to rush for 30 or more yards against them yet in 2026, but they must focus on limiting Alexander to stay in control of the game.

Vanderbilt could win a shootout

Vanderbilt's incredible 2024 victory over Alabama was just about as shocking as they come, but the means by which it won add up. Major upsets like the Commodores' often come in back-and-forth high-scoring affairs, with the underdog quarterback gashing the favored defense to pull his team to victory. Just a few weeks ago, Oklahoma State pulled off the young season's biggest upset so far in this same fashion, taking down then-No. 6 Oregon 39-31.



Georgia running back Chauncey Bowens (5) runs with the ball during the second half of a football game against Oklahoma in Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Sept. 26, 2026. Georgia won 41-13. PHOTO/EVAN FRILINGOS

Curtis will come to Athens with a chip on his shoulder, and with Georgia quarterback Gunner Stockton likely to lead his squad to an efficient day on offense, Curtis will need to find holes in the Bulldogs' defense to keep up. However, Georgia has fallen short in a couple of shootouts in recent memory.

In 2024, one week before that shocking upset against Vanderbilt, Alabama outlasted Georgia, coming through with a late score to defeat the Bulldogs 41-34 and survive a late comback. A similar story unraveled in Georgia's CFP quarterfinal game last year against Ole Miss in the Sugar Bowl, as a successful late drive lifted the Rebels to a 39-34 win on a field goal and safety in the final seconds.

Additionally, the Bulldogs could be in a difficult spot if they find themselves needing to convert on a deep ball. Long passes have never been an emphasis of offensive coordinator Mike Bobo's system, and the wide receiver room lacks size and experience.

Another challenge will be Vanderbilt's pass rush likely not providing Stockton much time to make decisions in the pocket. The Commodores are tied nationally for the 12th-most sacks in the entire Football Bowl Subdivision with 13, something else Georgia must look out for.

Prediction

While the Commodores have proved over the last two years they should no longer be counted out as they once were, the Bulldogs should not have much of a problem improving to 5-0 this season against Vanderbilt. With much of the focus on Curtis' return to Athens, the crowd should be able to lift the already more talented Bulldogs to another victory.

Both teams should be able to establish the run game, but Georgia's is expected to be more effective. The Commodores should force the Bulldogs to pass when possible and put pressure on Stockton, but Georgia should be able to handle what their opponents do in all three phases of the game. While Vanderbilt is a respectable enough opponent to keep the game competitive, Georgia will likely spend most of the contest in the driver seat.

Prediction: Georgia 33, Vanderbilt 13



Georgia running back Dwight Phillips Jr. (20) runs toward the end zone during a game against Oklahoma at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Sept. 26, 2026. Georgia won 41-13. PHOTO/CAROLINE NEWBERN

A new ball hawk

Demello Jones steps into the spotlight

Layla Nicholson

Demello Jones' biggest play of the season so far began with a ball in the air.

He broke on the pass, secured his first career interception and raced 43 yards down the sideline before being stopped at the 1-yard line against Western Kentucky. The play practically put Georgia in the end zone, leading to another score in a 70-20 win.

It was the kind of play Georgia has been wanting from Jones as he settles into a bigger role in the Bulldogs' secondary.

But a week later against Arkansas, Jones showed that his value goes beyond the highlight plays. He finished with a career-high six tackles in a game where he was tested early and often.

The junior defensive back entered 2026 after appearing in 12 games as a sophomore, recording around 25 tackles and five pass breakups. He was then not yet considered a full-time starter for the Bulldogs.

That changed this season, as Jones was thrown into the deep end.

He made his first career start in the season opener against Tennessee State, joining a secondary that returned preseason All-Americans KJ Bolden and Ellis Robinson IV. His increased role came after Georgia lost star cornerback Daylen Everette to the NFL.

The increased responsibility was not exactly a surprise. Jones had already shown flashes during his sophomore season, recording four tackles against both Auburn and Texas and two pass breakups against Ole Miss. However, when the Bulldogs met the Rebels again in the postseason, Jones was beat by wide receiver De'Zhaun Stribling in the final minute to set up the game-winning field goal.

By the end of the season, though, Jones had given Georgia a glimpse of what he could become with more training and playing time.

This season, he is getting the chance to do so consistently.

A week after his interception, Jones faced a different kind of challenge. Arkansas targeted him throughout the first half and found success in doing so. The Razorbacks continued to go after him on their final drive of the second quarter, setting up a field goal just before halftime.

But Jones didn't let the difficult moments define his afternoon. He made stops when he needed to as Georgia pulled away in the second half.

Head coach Kirby Smart noticed the difference.

"I was proud of the way Demello bounced back," Smart said in a postgame press conference.

For a cornerback, the ability to move on may be just as important as making the big play in the first place, as the position leaves little room for error. A missed assignment can become a completion, and a missed tackle can become a first down.

Smart, a former defensive back for Georgia himself, knows that up-and-down nature all too well.

"At the end of the day, when you play corner at Georgia, you're gonna be asked to play one-on-one," Smart said in the press conference. "You're gonna win some, you're gonna lose some, and that's the way we play."

Jones has spent much of his Georgia career learning how to handle those moments.

A four-star recruit from Swainsboro, Georgia, Jones arrived in Athens in 2024 after playing multiple positions in high school. He rushed for more than 1,200 yards in high school while also playing defensive back, giving him experience on both sides of the ball before he settled into his role in Georgia's secondary.



Georgia defensive back Demello Jones (8) celebrates after an interception during a game against Western Kentucky at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia on Saturday, Sept. 12, 2026. Georgia won 70-20. PHOTO/EVAN FRILINGOS

Robinson said in the spring that Jones had taken on more responsibility as one of the older players in the room.

"He's definitely growing up," Robinson said, according to Dawg Post. "I'd say he's been more mature and taking on a leadership role this year knowing that we're the older guys in the room."

Three games into the season, Jones has already experienced some of the highs and lows that come with that responsibility. He will need to take what he has learned and use that momentum going into the game against the Commodores on Saturday.

"In the SEC, you've got to be physical," Jones said after the game against Arkansas. "This is a physical place. Everybody kind of knows that. That's what coach harps about all the time. We know going into these SEC games, that's why as the defensive backs we're going to have to step up."

There was the interception against Western Kentucky. There was the career-high six tackles against Arkansas — and there were the plays in between, the ones that tested whether he could respond when things didn't go as planned.

So far, Jones has shown that he belongs in his new role. But with SEC play underway and Vanderbilt coming to Athens, Georgia will need him to continue rising up to the challenges ahead.









Georgia wide receiver London Humphreys (16) catches a touchdown in a game against Western Kentucky at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia on Saturday, Sept. 12, 2026. Georgia won 70-20. PHOTO/EVAN FRILINGOS

Coming full circle

London Humphreys faces former team

Layla Nicholson

Just three years ago, London Humphreys was a Vanderbilt freshman catching a 49-yard touchdown against Georgia.

Now, Humphreys will experience the same matchup from a completely different perspective.

A Nashville, Tennessee native, Humphreys spent his first college season at Vanderbilt, where he quickly established himself as one of the Commodores' best young playmakers. He played in all 12 games as a true freshman and tied for second-most receiving touchdowns by a freshman since at least 2008. He finished the 2023 season with 439 receiving yards and four touchdowns, earning a spot on the SEC All-Freshman team.

During Vanderbilt's game that year against the then top-ranked Bulldogs, Humphreys' 49-yard-touchdown came off a pass from quarterback Ken Seals on the Commodores' opening drive, giving Vanderbilt an early 7-0 lead. Georgia eventually came back to win 37-20.

After his freshman season, Humphreys entered the transfer portal and landed at Georgia. He made an immediate impact in his Bulldogs debut, catching a 40-yard touchdown against Clemson in the 2024 season opener.

"[Georgia] just felt like where I wanted to be and where I could become the best version of myself," Humphreys said in 2023 after he announced his transfer.

Now in 2026, Humphreys' role at Georgia has evolved beyond catching passes.

While his work as wide receiver remains important, Humphreys has become a key contributor on special teams and has embraced the less glamorous parts of playing college football. He has been willing to block, cover kicks and do whatever Georgia needs from him.

That willingness has not gone unnoticed by head coach Kirby Smart.

"The more special teams he plays, the more money he gets," Smart said at a press conference following the win against Arkansas. "So he wants to play every snap on special teams. I keep trying to take him off to save money, and it's not working."

After Georgia's win over Arkansas, Smart offered another explanation for why Humphreys has carved out such an important role.

"He cares so much," Smart said of Humphreys in a post-game press conference. "He's the highest-character kid on the team. He'll do whatever he can to help the team. He never complains about anything. He's one of the best blockers."

Saturday will pit Humphreys against the program where his college career started. Facing Vanderbilt, the memories may be difficult to ignore.

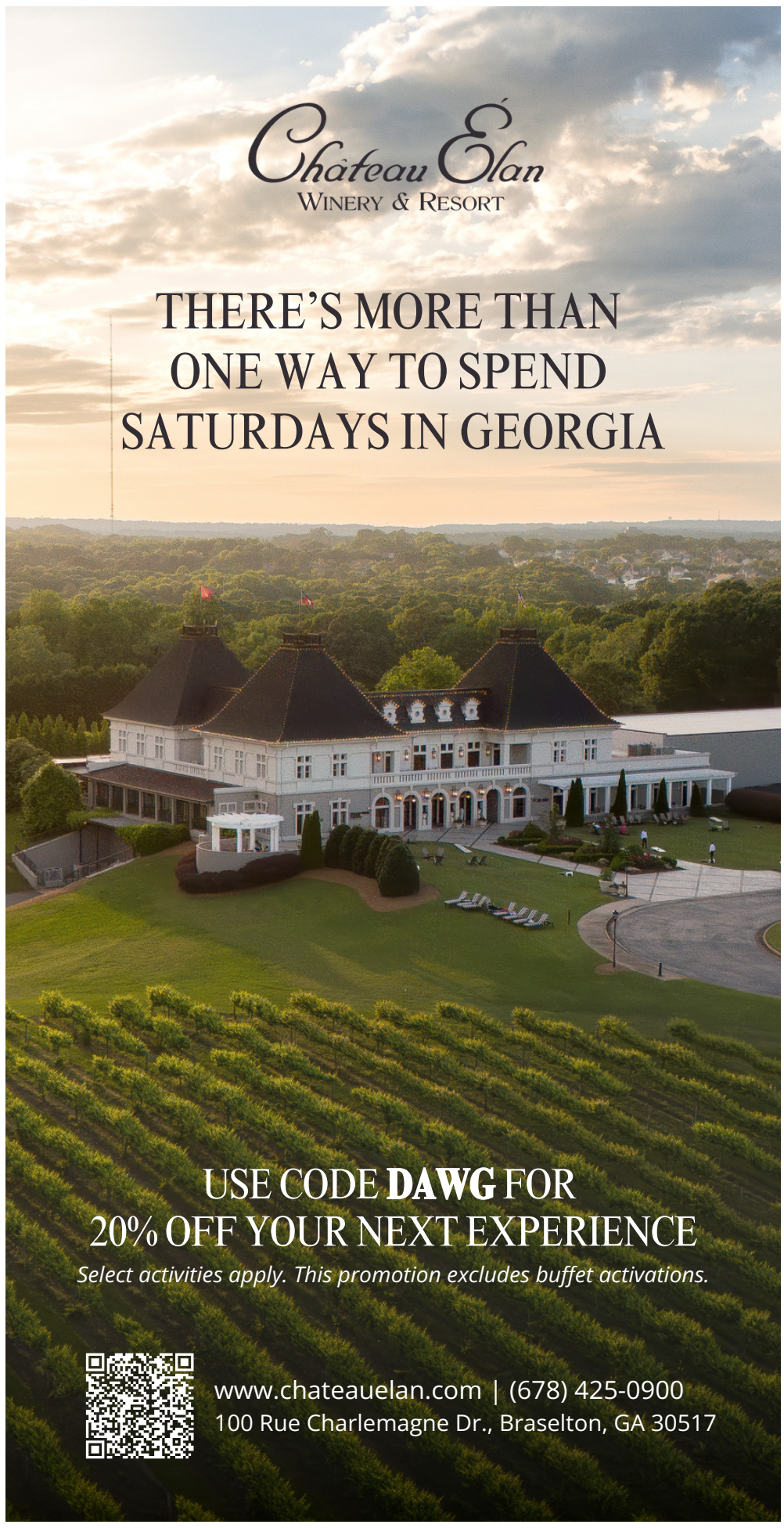
Humphreys knows the team across the field. He knows what it is like to wear the signature black and gold of the Commodores. He knows the people that helped him find his footing as a young, opportunistic freshman.

This time, though, he will be wearing red and black. It will be Humphreys' first game against his former team since transferring to Georgia.

Humphreys is no longer a rookie trying to make his mark against one of the SEC's top programs. He is now a veteran contributor on one of those programs.

His college journey has taken him from Nashville to Athens. Now, between the hedges on Saturday, his past and present will collide, with big implications for Georgia's future.







GRAPHIC/JACK HESPRICH

OPINION Georgia doesn't need Jared Curtis

Evan Waldman

In March 2024, then-high school quarterback Jared Curtis committed to Georgia. Just over a year later, after reopening his recruitment, Curtis pledged his allegiance to Georgia yet again on May 5, 2025.

The second commitment did not last either. Later in the year, on Dec. 2, Curtis flipped his commitment from the Bulldogs to Vanderbilt before the start of the early signing period, ending a long and dramatic recruitment process.

Now, Curtis finally arrives between the hedges — just not wearing red and black. Instead, he'll arrive in Athens leading the Commodores as a true freshman.

For Georgia, that might not be such a bad thing. The Bulldogs don't need Curtis — not because he lacks talent, but because the modern quarterback landscape gives Georgia plenty of ways to move forward without him.

The biggest reason Georgia hasn't had to worry about losing Curtis is the return and production of fifth-year quarterback Gunner Stockton.

After leading the Bulldogs to an SEC championship and a College Football Playoff appearance last season, Stockton elected to return for his final year of eligibility rather than enter the NFL Draft. In his first year as a starter, Stockton threw for 2,894 yards, 24 touchdowns and just five interceptions. He added more on the ground with 462 rushing yards and 10 touchdowns with his legs.

More importantly, Stockton proved he could perform against Georgia's biggest opponents, going 5-2 against ranked teams in 2025 while completing over 83% of his fourth-quarter passes in those games and throwing seven touchdowns along the way.

Even if Curtis had stayed committed to Georgia, it would have been difficult for the true freshman to compete with Stockton for the starting job. Instead of dealing with a quarterback competition or putting the offense in the hands of a rookie, the Bulldogs entered the season knowing exactly who their leader would be.

The bigger question for Georgia comes after Stockton leaves, but Curtis' departure doesn't mean the Bulldogs are out of options.

The transfer portal has changed the way programs can build quarterback rooms. Georgia no longer has to rely solely on developing a high school player for several years before giving him the reins. If the Bulldogs do not believe one of their current quarterbacks is ready to replace Stockton in 2027, head coach Kirby Smart can look to the portal for an experienced starter.

Georgia has already shown a willingness to use the portal at quarterback, bringing in former five-star Jaden Rashada from Arizona State ahead of the 2024 season before he eventually transferred to Sacramento State.

Losing Curtis may have created uncertainty about Georgia's future quarterback, but in the current era of college football, uncertainty at quarterback can be addressed much faster than it could have been a handful of years ago.

Then there is Jayden Wade, who could eventually make the loss of Curtis even less significant.

Wade — currently the top quarterback in the 2028 recruiting class according to ESPN — committed to Georgia in November, giving the Bulldogs another highly regarded quarterback to develop for the future.

At 6-foot-4, Wade already has the size and arm talent that made him a priority for Georgia early in his recruitment.

Of course, expecting a 2028 recruit to solve the Bulldogs' future quarterback situation would be premature. Wade still has two high school seasons to finish, and plenty can change in recruiting before he ever arrives in Athens, as seen in Curtis' recruitment process.

Still, Wade's commitment shows that losing Curtis did not prevent Georgia from continuing to attract talented quarterbacks.

Curtis' path at Vanderbilt has not been as straightforward as the attention surrounding his recruitment might have suggested.

Despite arriving as the highest-rated recruit in Vanderbilt history, Curtis did not win the starting job out of fall camp. Head coach Clark Lea instead turned to senior Blaze Berlowitz to open the season, with Curtis coming off the bench in each of the Commodores' first two games.

Curtis made the most of those opportunities. After completing 7-of-9 passes for 60 yards against Austin Peay, he replaced Berlowitz early against Delaware and completed 14 of 22 passes for 210 yards and a touchdown while adding two more scores on the ground.

That performance was enough for Lea to end the quarterback competition and hand the offense to Curtis, saying the freshman had "earned it" and was ready to lead the Commodores.

Curtis winning the job this early shows why Georgia wanted him in the first place. But it also highlights the difference between Georgia and Vanderbilt. The Commodores needed Curtis to emerge as their quarterback. The Bulldogs never did.

Evan Waldman is a junior journalism major at the University of Georgia.

NUMBERS TO KNOW: Week 5

#0 — Georgia wide receiver Sacovie White-Helton

White-Helton has taken a larger role in Georgia's offense after serving primarily as a reserve during his first two seasons. The junior caught eight passes for 70 yards in 2025 but had already surpassed that production by Week 3 this season. White-Helton's highlight thus far came against Western Kentucky, when he turned a short pass from Gunner Stockton into a 70-yard touchdown. He can also make a difference as a specialist returning punts, so if White-Helton continues being an explosive play waiting to happen, he can carve out an important role on the Georgia offense.

#0 — Vanderbilt wide receiver Junior Sherrill

Sherrill has developed into one of Vanderbilt's most consistent receiving threats. The senior started 11 games in 2025, finishing second on the team in receiving yards with 784 on 54 catches while tying the team lead with seven receiving touchdowns. Sherrill carried that production into 2026, opening his season with 21 receptions, 367 receiving yards and two touchdowns in his first four games. Highlighting his season thus far is his performance against NC State, where he caught two touchdowns, moving him into the top 10 in program history with 15 career receiving touchdowns.

#7 — Georgia safety Khalil Barnes

Barnes has quickly become an important part of the Georgia secondary after transferring from Clemson this offseason. In his three seasons with the Tigers, the Athens native recorded 139 tackles and seven interceptions. Barnes has stepped into a major role for the Bulldogs and started against Arkansas, recording four tackles, a tackle for loss and a pass breakup, while also delivering a pass breakup against Oklahoma. The former North Oconee High School standout gives Georgia an experienced presence in a secondary filled with talented players.

#28 — Vanderbilt running back Sedrick Alexander

Alexander has been a steady part of Vanderbilt's offense throughout his career. The senior started all 13 games in 2025, rushing for 567 yards and a team-high 11 touchdowns while adding 200 receiving yards and four more scores. Alexander entered 2026 as one of Vanderbilt's most proficient offensive players and crucial returners, having appeared in 38 games with 32 starts. Against Auburn, Alexander was held to 13 yards on 11 carries, but he did have a rushing touchdown. He also has previous experience against Georgia, scoring against the Bulldogs as a freshman in 2023.

#16 — Georgia wide receiver London Humphreys

Humphreys has an obvious connection to this matchup after beginning his college career at Vanderbilt. As a freshman for the Commodores in 2023, he finished second on the team with 439 receiving yards and four touchdowns, including a 49-yard touchdown against Georgia. Since transferring to Athens, Humphreys has remained part of Georgia's receiving rotation and caught 18 passes for 276 yards and three touchdowns last season. The Nashville, Tennessee native now gets the opportunity to face his former program and hometown team.

#29 — Vanderbilt edge Miles Capers

Capers has been a dependable presence in Vanderbilt's defensive front. The graduate edge rusher started all 13 games last season and led the Commodores with 9 1/2 tackles for loss and 4 1/2 sacks while adding five quarterback hurries. Capers has continued to create problems in opposing backfields this season. He recorded a career-high four tackles for loss and two sacks in Vanderbilt's win over Delaware. The 6-foot-4, 249-pound defender gives Vanderbilt a seasoned pass rusher that Georgia's offensive line will have to account for all game.

Evan Waldman

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Georgia tight end Jaden Reddell (23) runs with the ball during a football game against Tennessee State at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Sept. 5, 2026. PHOTO/LILY KATE AKINS



Georgia tight end Elyiss Williams (10) in a game against Tennessee State at Sanford Stadium in Athens, Georgia, on Saturday, Sept. 5, 2026. PHOTO/LILY KATE AKINS

Transcending the game

Georgia's tight ends crucial to offensive success

Zach Pascuzzi

After not catching a single pass against Tennessee State and recording just one reception for four yards against Western Kentucky, tight end Lawson Luckie finally broke out in Georgia's SEC opener against Arkansas, finishing with three catches for 59 yards and his first receiving touchdown of the season.

The biggest moment of the game may not have been that touchdown, thrown by backup quarterback Ryan Puglisi to put the Bulldogs up by 35. But Luckie's first two catches, which went for 33 yards on Georgia's opening drive and 24 yards on the play directly before his score, showcased just how valuable Luckie — and the rest of the Bulldogs' tight ends — will be in Georgia's offensive scheme this season.

"It felt good to finally get in and get it rolling," Luckie said on scoring his first touchdown of the year at a press conference. "It feels like after the first one, they start to come in, but you gotta knock the first one off."

But even if the main star among Georgia's tight ends was quiet in the Bulldogs' first two wins, the supporting cast made up for it, stealing the show for themselves.

Against the Tigers in Week 1, three different tight ends – Elyiss Williams, Jaden Reddell and Kaiden Prothro — each hauled in touchdowns, with the latter two scoring for the first time in their Georgia careers.

Then against the Hilltoppers, sophomore tight end Ethan Barbour caught his first career score for the Bulldogs: a big moment, given a major injury in Week 2 of his freshman year that caused him to miss the entire rest of the regular season.

"It meant a lot to me, just knowing that all the hard work paid off," Barbour said in a press conference.

In total, Georgia's tight ends have already combined for five touchdowns this season. The group had just six all of last season.

Luckie, whose breakout performance in 2025 came when he scored in three touchdowns against Ole Miss in a thrilling 43-35 win, knows the Bulldogs' tight end room is crowded with talent.

"We're all adjusting to it. We're all competitive," Luckie said in a press conference. "We know that every single one of us deserves the right to be on the field … but everyone does a great job of supporting each other and not getting upset when the other person shines."

Both Luckie and Barbour credit Georgia tight ends coach Todd Hartley with putting together one of the most efficient tight end rooms in college football.

Luckie said that Hartley has instilled mental resilience in the group to keep fighting and stay motivated even when games don't go as planned.

"No one's getting left out. No one's getting left behind," Luckie said in a press conference. "You can't get in your feelings when the ball doesn't come your way, because the most important thing is that you are ready when your number actually is called. You won't be able to perform the best you can if you're worried about a past outcome."

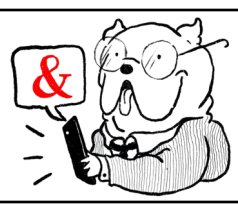
Barbour also noted that Hartley is the type of coach who attracts top talent.

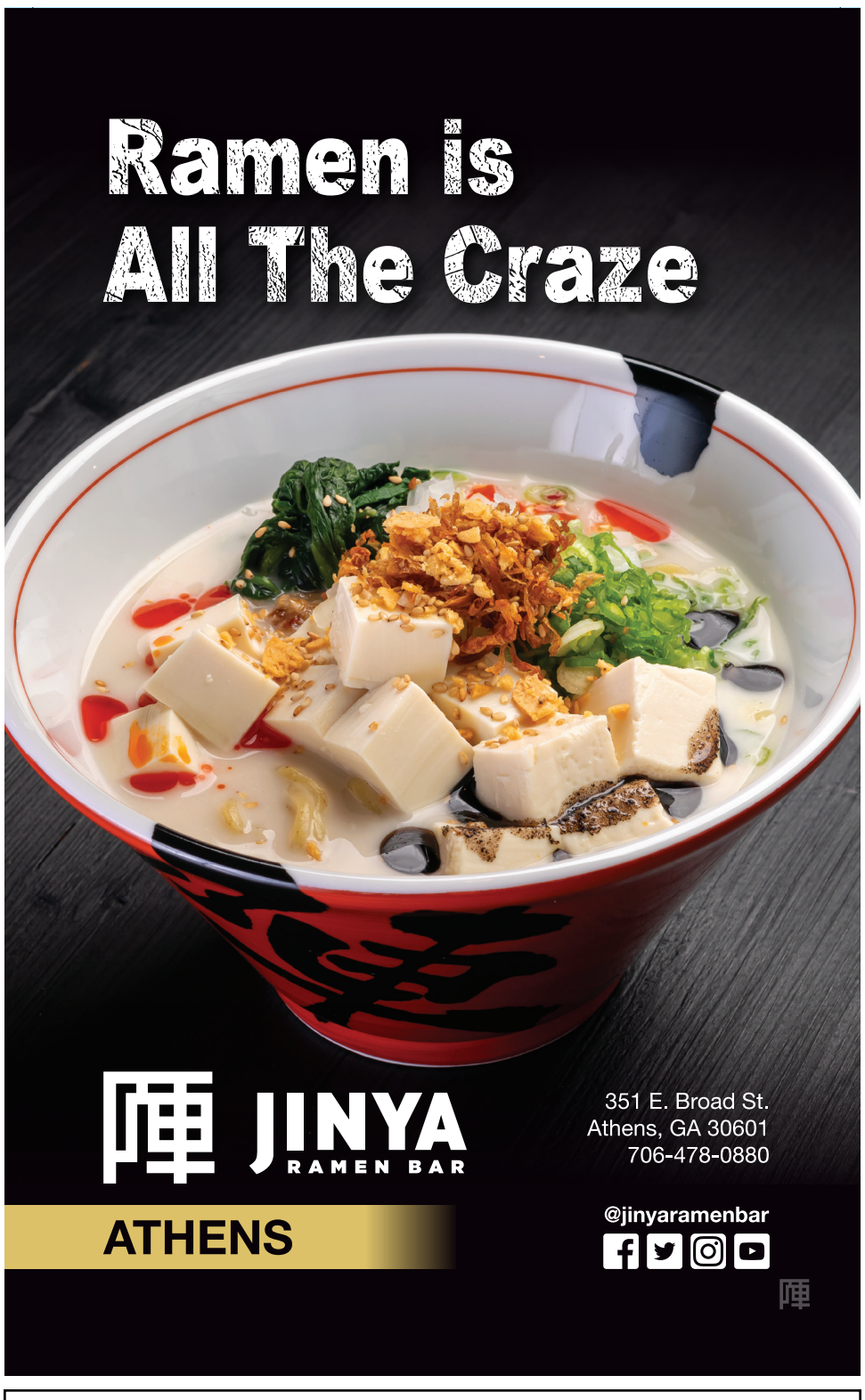
"He has some juice," Barbour said in a press conference. "The first time he came to practice … you could just tell he had a certain type of energy about him. You wanted to be around him. You wanted to be coached by him."

For his part, Hartley emphasized a selfless philosophy during fall camp that can be seen in how willing Georgia's tight ends are to fulfill different roles in the offense.

"If you concern yourself with outcomes … you're going to be disappointed," Hartley said. " Do I want to catch more balls? Of course we want that. But if our job is to go out there and run block 62 plays, we're going to go out there and run block 62 plays to the best of our ability."

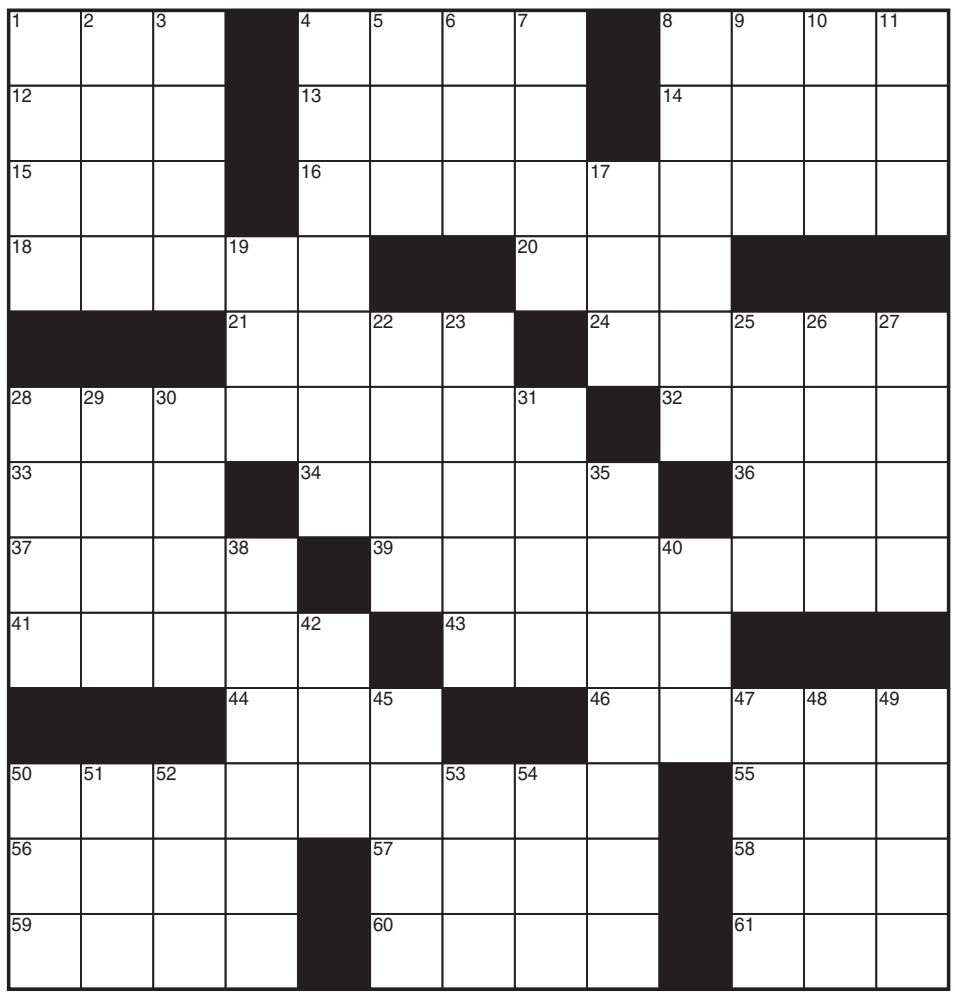
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Thursday Crossword - Answer Online FRIDAY, Oct. 2



ACROSS

1. Cockpit reading (abbr.)
4. "Take it or leave it"
8. Loot
12. Bird word
13. Coal unit
14. Drop off
15. Same old, same old
16. Powerlessness
18. Swelling
20. Place for a pin
21. Ancient Egyptian emblems
24. Pike
28. Got off topic
32. Honshu drink
33. Member of the flock
34. ____ boom
36. Family girl
37. Svelte
39. Deed
41. Church assembly
43. Alter
44. Chest protector?
46. Scores in a rink
50. Zeppelin or Hindenburg
55. Golfer's concern
56. Cameo shape, often
57. Elbow grease
58. Bucolic expanse
59. Data measure
60. Doesn't flow
61. "Dee-lish!"

DOWN

1. A little of a lot?
2. Bright, as a color
3. Carry
4. Criminal-record listing
5. Bottom line
6. Angel's antonym
7. Detect
8. Ratings period
9. Far from ruddy
10. South African org
11. "Wow!"
17. "____ the season ..."
19. March hare characteristic
22. Cow poke?
23. Madrid Mr.
25. Lighten
26. Like, with "to"
27. Others
28. Sprays
29. Not as planned
30. Teutonic turndown
31. Backgammon equipment
35. Blackjack's cousins
38. Art installation
40. Farm call
42. Get to the bottom of things?
45. Angler's hope
47. Adversary's antithesis
48. Stead
49. Clothing closure
50. Driver's lic. stat
51. It climbs the walls
52. Kind of race
53. Bounce like a buoy
54. Women's ____

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McKenna Edwards

Senior Editor of Guides & Magazines

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.

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.

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
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA



Showcase

Highlights from the Sept. 26 game against Oklahoma













PHOTO/EVAN FRILINGOS

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The University of Georgia Spike Squad cheers during the 103rd University of Georgia Homecoming Parade in downtown Athens, Georgia, on Friday, Oct. 3, 2025. PHOTO/KRINA PATEL

UGA Homecoming

A weekend of events for students, alumni and more

Nicholas Garrison

The University of Georgia's 104th homecoming celebration continues this weekend with a lineup of events across UGA, including the annual homecoming game and homecoming court.

Students, alumni, staff and community members can take part in the festivities beginning Friday evening and continuing through Saturday's game at Sanford Stadium.

The Red & Black has compiled a guide to the homecoming game and the homecoming court.

Homecoming game

The homecoming festivities will continue Saturday, Oct. 3, at Sanford Stadium, where Georgia football will play against Vanderbilt at 12:45 p.m. While at the game, the homecoming court will crown a homecoming king, a homecoming queen and the winners of the Spirit of Homecoming (SOH) Competition.

The game will be Vanderbilt's first trip to Sanford Stadium since 2022, where Georgia dominated that meeting 55-0. The Bulldogs most recently faced the Commodores in 2023 in Nashville, winning 37-20.

Saturday's game will also give alumni returning to Athens another opportunity to participate in homecoming outside of the scheduled events. Several UGA schools and colleges are hosting tailgates and other gatherings before kickoff, adding to the gameday activities surrounding the weekend.

Franklin College of Arts and Sciences is hosting an all-day tailgate on New College Lawn. Terry College is hosting a tailgate at the Coca-Cola Plaza in the Terry College Business Learning Community beginning at 9:45 a.m. Mary Frances Early College of Education is hosting a tailgate three hours before kickoff at the head terrace outside Zell B. Miller Learning Center.

Homecoming court

Although the court is determined through an interview process, the student body votes to determine the homecoming king and queen at halftime. The court is made up of 10 people: five nominees for both king and queen.

Voting for king and queen closes Friday, Oct. 2.

King nominations

Jack Hobgood is a senior finance major from Peachtree Corners, Georgia. He has certificates in legal studies and personal and organizational leadership. Hobgood is representing the UGA Visitors Center.

Blake Martin is a senior political science and international affairs major from Hoschton, Georgia. He has certificates in personal and organizational leadership and applied politics. Martin is representing New Student Orientation.

Luke Williams is a senior public relations major from Marietta, Georgia, and he is on the Double Dawg pathway to a Master of Public Administration. He is representing the Arch Society.

Trey Wilson is a senior finance major from Dacula, Georgia, with a minor in educational psychology and a certificate in personal and organizational leadership. He is representing the Student Government Association.

Mark Zimmer is a senior political science and international affairs major from Carrollton, Georgia. He has minors in Spanish and Law, Jurisprudence and the State. Zimmer is representing the Model United Nations team.

Queen nominations

Lauren Baker is a senior management information systems major with a certificate in sustainability from Columbus, Georgia. She is on the Double Dawg pathway to a Master's in Business Analytics. She is representing the National Pan-Hellenic Council.

Myla Brown is a senior advertising major from Detroit, Michigan. She has a minor in fashion merchandising and a certificate in personal and organizational leadership. Brown is representing the Student Alumni Council.

Kayla Calloway is a senior political science major and African American Studies minor from Valdosta, Georgia. She is representing the University Judiciary.

Journee Jordan is a senior public relations major from Jesup, Georgia. She is representing the Student Government Association.

Carter Nichols is a senior public relations and international affairs major from Duluth, Georgia. She has a minor in Korean language and a certificate in public affairs communication. Nichols is representing Shop with a Bulldog.

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