

GAMEDAY
PREVIEW

The
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**GEORGIA
VS. TEXAS**

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Georgia running back Nate Frazier (3) in action during the 2024 SEC Championship game between Georgia and Texas at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, on Dec. 7, 2024. Georgia won 22-19.
PHOTO/LANEY MARTIN

A3 **First trip to Sanford** Previewing the SEC championship game rematch

A5 **Stockton's debut** Remembering Stockton's first game against Texas

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An emerging rivalry

The history between Georgia and Texas

Romell Williams

When Georgia and Texas meet, it's more than just two powerhouse programs colliding — it's a rare matchup defined by high stakes, historic moments and championship implications.

The all-time series sits narrowly in Texas' favor at 4-3, but the story between the Bulldogs and the Longhorns runs much deeper than the record suggests. From Georgia's stunning upset in the 1984 Cotton Bowl to last season's conference showdowns, this rivalry has produced some of the most memorable games in each program's history.

Texas takes early control

The first three meetings between the two schools came in the mid-20th century and all went Texas' way. The Longhorns opened the series with a 41-28 win in the 1949 Orange Bowl, then followed it up with victories in 1957 and 1958.

For decades, those early results were all Georgia fans had to remember. The programs didn't meet again until the 1980s, when the Bulldogs finally broke through in an unforgettable fashion.

The 1983 season: Georgia's Cotton Bowl Classic

The Bulldogs entered the 1984 Cotton Bowl Classic as underdogs. Texas was undefeated, ranked No. 2 in the nation and looking to claim a national championship. Georgia, sitting at No. 7, had a chance to play spoiler — and it did just that.

The game was a defensive slugfest in the Dallas cold. Texas managed three field goals to take a 9-3 lead late in the fourth quarter, appearing to have the game in hand. But when the Longhorns muffed a punt deep in their own territory, Georgia pounced.

With just over three minutes left, Georgia quarterback John Lastinger kept the ball on an option play and dashed 17 yards into the end zone for the game's only touchdown. Kevin Butler's extra point gave Georgia a stunning 10-9 lead and ultimately the victory.

The upset denied Texas its shot at a national title and instantly became one of the signature moments of Georgia head coach Vince Dooley's career. For Georgia, it was a statement win, showcasing the grit and toughness that would come to define the program for decades.

A new era: The 2024 matchups

When Texas joined the SEC, it breathed new life into the matchup. The Bulldogs and Longhorns didn't waste time rekindling the fire, meeting twice in 2024 in games that shaped both teams' seasons.

In a battle between top-five teams, Georgia walked into Austin, Texas, on Oct. 19, 2024, and stunned the No. 1 Longhorns 30-15. The Bulldogs' defense manhandled the Texas offense, as several of Georgia's stars made impact plays. Cornerback Daylen Everette recorded an interception and forced fumble, while edge rushers Jalon Walker and Mykel Williams combined for five sacks. Georgia's defense finished the game with seven sacks, asserting its dominance over the Texas offensive line. Meanwhile, running back Trevor Etienne found the end zone three times and picked up the slack for a struggling Carson Beck, who threw three interceptions in the game.

It was a statement win for Georgia and a message to the rest of the SEC that the Bulldogs were still the standard, even on the road against one of the sport's rising powers.

The rematch in the SEC championship game on Dec. 7, 2024, in Atlanta delivered all the drama fans expected. Georgia and Texas traded blows for four quarters before the Bulldogs escaped with a 22-19 overtime win to claim another SEC crown. Everette was the difference-maker for this epic game, coming away with two key interceptions and winning the title game's MVP award.

While much of the spotlight centered on quarterback Gunner Stockton's late-game heroics, the broader story was Georgia's composure — a veteran team refusing to flinch under pressure. Texas pushed them to the brink, but the Bulldogs' experience and defensive steadiness made the difference.

A matchup built on moments

Though Georgia and Texas have only met seven times, the impact of those games has been enormous. From the 1984 Cotton Bowl Classic upset to the SEC championship thriller, each meeting has added a new layer of tension and mutual respect.

For Texas, the matchup tests where it stands in college football's toughest conference. For Georgia, it's a reminder of how the program's biggest moments have often come on the sport's grandest stages.

As both programs continue to rank among the sport's elite, the Georgia-Texas rivalry — once a rare intersection of powerhouses — is becoming a fixture of the SEC landscape.



Georgia defensive back K.J. Bolden (4) in action during the Georgia vs. Texas game at Darrell K Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium in Austin, Texas, on Saturday, Oct. 19, 2024. Georgia won 30-15. PHOTO/LANEY MARTIN



Georgia running back Trevor Etienne (1) in action during the Georgia vs. Texas game at Darrell K Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium in Austin, Texas, on Saturday, Oct. 19, 2024. Georgia won 30-15. PHOTO/LANEY MARTIN

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Georgia quarterback Gunner Stockton (14) snaps the ball during the 2024 SEC Championship game between Georgia and Texas at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta, Georgia, on Saturday, Dec. 7, 2024. Georgia won 22-19. PHOTO/AVNI TRIVEDI

Texas’ first trip to Athens

Previewing Georgia vs. Texas

Riley Baugh

For the first time in program history, Georgia will host Texas in Sanford Stadium. The matchup marks only the eighth meeting between the two programs — a series that began in 1949 and last took place in the 2024 SEC championship. In that game, the Bulldogs rallied behind then-backup quarterback Gunner Stockton to defeat Texas 22-19 in overtime to secure another SEC title, their third in eight years.

A year later, the circumstances are different, but the stakes remain high. Georgia enters ranked No. 5 in the AP Poll, fighting to become the second program this century to repeat as SEC champion. Texas sits at No. 10 with a 7-2 overall record and a 4-1 mark in conference play after narrowly defeating then-No. 9 Vanderbilt 34-31.

The Longhorns also enter Saturday’s game with an added advantage. Texas had a bye week before traveling to Athens for the rematch of last year’s SEC title game, which will also serve as Georgia’s final regular-season conference matchup. The rest could prove valuable, especially for a team that went 0-2 against Georgia last season.

Under head coach Kirby Smart, Georgia has built success around structure and discipline, leaning on physicality on both sides of the ball. Texas, however, brings one of the nation’s most talented rosters and quarterback Arch Manning, whose name alone attracts national attention. The meeting between two playoff hopefuls, each built differently, could shape the direction of the SEC race.

Home-field advantage

Georgia’s record at home has become a defining part of its identity under Smart. The Bulldogs are 36-1 in Athens since losing to South Carolina in 2019, with their lone loss at the hands of Alabama on Sept. 27. This season, the Bulldogs are averaging 34.4 points per game at home and allowing just over 17. That dominance has made Sanford Stadium a difficult environment for almost any opponent, and Georgia’s ability to win at home has been one of its greatest advantages.

The Bulldogs rank seventh in the SEC in total offense, averaging 436.3 yards per game. Their attack starts on the ground with running backs Chauncey Bowens and Nate Frazier, who have combined for 1,049 rushing yards this season. Establishing the run will be difficult against a Texas defense that ranks first in the SEC and second nationally in

rushing yards allowed, giving up just 78.7 per game.

Safety Michael Taaffe and linebacker Anthony Hill Jr. lead a physical Longhorn defense that surrenders only 16.4 points per game. For Georgia, balance will be key — mixing Bowens’ and Frazier’s downhill runs with Stockton’s short-passing rhythm and designed quarterback runs to keep Texas from dictating the game’s tempo.

Quarterback contrast

Saturday’s game features two quarterbacks central to their teams’ identities. For Georgia, Stockton represents competitiveness, growth and composure in decisive moments. For Texas, Manning brings expectation, potential and a level of hype that few players in recent memory have matched.

Stockton has thrown for 2,040 yards with 15 touchdowns and two interceptions this season. His command of offensive coordinator Mike Bobo’s system has kept Georgia efficient on early downs, and his mobility gives defenses another challenge. Stockton’s confidence stems from experience, particularly his performance against Texas in last year’s SEC championship.

Manning arrived at Texas with more attention than nearly any college player in recent memory. As the nephew of former NFL quarterbacks Peyton and Eli Manning and the centerpiece of Texas’ recruiting resurgence, his arrival in Austin, Texas, was viewed as the beginning of a new chapter for the program. His first year as the established starter has showcased both promise and growing pains.

Through nine games, Manning has thrown for 2,123 yards with 18 touchdowns and six interceptions, using his legs to extend plays. His arm strength and pocket awareness make him one of the SEC’s most dynamic players, but his ability to handle Georgia’s disguised blitzes and shifting fronts will be crucial.

Georgia’s defense struggled at times to contain Florida quarterback D.J. Lagway two weeks ago, especially on broken plays and quarterback scrambles. Manning’s size and athleticism poses a similar problem. If Georgia fails to contain the edges, he has the tools to turn those moments into drive-extending plays or scores.

What to expect

Texas averages just over 380 yards per game, ranking 10th in the SEC, but its production has steadily increased. The Longhorns have scored at least 30 points in back-to-back SEC games, relying on a balanced approach between

Manning’s passing and a backfield led by running back Quintrevion Wisner.

Wisner gives Texas the flexibility to remain patient with its play calling. Wide receiver Ryan Wingo’s speed provides a vertical threat that was on display against Vanderbilt when he turned a short pass behind the line of scrimmage into a 75-yard touchdown on the game’s first play.

The week off could make Texas even more dangerous. The Longhorns’ offense is built on pace and spacing, so an extra week of rest allows for both physical recovery and deeper preparation. Georgia’s defense is allowing 310.8 yards per game, ranking 20th nationally, but has been susceptible against explosive plays. Missed tackles and blown coverages have surfaced in recent weeks, leaving the Bulldogs vulnerable against teams that spread the field and attack vertically.

For Georgia’s offense, the focus will be on finding ways to involve wide receiver Zachariah Branch. The USC transfer added speed and playmaking ability to the Bulldogs’ passing attack. Through nine games, he has 53 receptions for 542 yards and three touchdowns, averaging 10.2 yards per catch. His career-high 10-catch, 112-yard performance against Florida illustrated his ability to serve as both a reliable target and an explosive option after the catch.

Stockton and Bobo will look to get Branch involved early, especially in the slot and on screens to neutralize Texas’ pass rush. Against a defense that thrives on limiting the run, Georgia will rely on Branch’s acceleration and route precision to stretch the field horizontally. If he can consistently find open space and create yards after the catch, Georgia could force Texas to adjust its coverage and open the middle for Bowens and Frazier.

Prediction

The Longhorns’ defense will test Georgia’s offensive line and could limit the run game early. Manning’s athleticism and arm talent will challenge Georgia’s secondary, but the Bulldogs’ dominance at home remains a major factor.

Expect Texas to stay within striking distance for much of the night before Georgia’s defense settles in and forces a key turnover late. This matchup is full of playoff implications, with both teams capable of making a statement win, but the Bulldogs’ consistency at home and ability to adjust in-game give them the edge.

Prediction: Georgia 31, Texas 28

Pathway to the championship

How Texas can help Georgia reach the SEC championship game

Ben Kule

With the SEC standings crowded at the top, a few things will have to go Georgia's way to receive a bid to the conference championship game, but even with just one SEC game remaining on the Bulldogs' schedule, it isn't out of the question.

Currently, 9-0 Texas A&M and 8-1 Alabama are the favorites to meet in Atlanta, as both sit 6-0 in conference play. In order to get a leg up on one of these two teams, the Bulldogs will need help from other teams in the conference — most likely coming from this week's opponent.

If Georgia falls to Texas, not only will it be eliminated from SEC championship contention, but its hopes of reaching the College Football Playoff, or CFP, are in serious jeopardy. However, a win solidifies the Bulldogs' position over the Longhorns in the standings, and because Georgia holds the tiebreaker over Ole Miss from its 43-35 win over the Rebels in Week 8, it will own sole possession of third place.

Week 14 drama

Unlike Georgia, which completes SEC play in Week 12 and finishes the season against Charlotte and Georgia Tech, the Aggies and the Crimson Tide face in-state SEC rivals in Week 14. These feisty, volatile games could be the Bulldogs' key to reaching the conference championship game.



Georgia quarterback Gunner Stockton talks with media members during the 2025 SEC Media Days on July 15, 2025, at the College Football Hall of Fame in Atlanta. PHOTO/ETHAN GREENE

If Alabama defeats Oklahoma next week, which the Crimson Tide lost to last year to solidify Georgia's trip to the championship game against Texas, it will clinch its place in Atlanta for the ninth time in 14 years. Even if it loses to Auburn in the Iron Bowl, it will hold the necessary tiebreakers.

However, Texas A&M won't have the same luxury going into the final week when trying to reach its first SEC championship game appearance. If the Longhorns lose to Georgia, but defeat the Aggies, the Bulldogs would hold the tiebreaker over Texas A&M.

Texas and Texas A&M used to face off every season, but when the Aggies left the Big 12 for the SEC in 2012, the rivalry paused. Disagreements between the programs' athletic directors resulted in no nonconference games being scheduled until Texas followed suit and joined the SEC in 2024.

Despite the 12-year hiatus, Texas has had the upper hand in the rivalry, which is good news for the Bulldogs.

Last season, the No. 3 Longhorns stormed into College Station, Texas, defeating the No. 20 Aggies 17-7. Texas has also won 10 of the 13 meetings since 2000. This year, Texas A&M has to travel to Austin, Texas, making an already difficult challenge that much steeper.

Championship outlook

If Georgia is able to reach the SEC championship game, it will most likely be against Alabama, an opponent that's proven tough for the Bulldogs. Playing in Athens for the first time in 10 years, the Crimson Tide ended Georgia's home winning streak at 33 wins with a 24-21 victory in Week 5. Additionally, Alabama has beaten Georgia in 10 of the last 11 meetings, with four of those wins coming in the SEC title game.

If Georgia loses the conference championship game, it will be put in an interesting spot. At 11-2, it should still easily reach the CFP. However, unlike last year, the Bulldogs would have to participate in the first round, and if placed below No. 8, would have to do so on the road. If Georgia wins, though, a bye is essentially guaranteed.

However, a loss to Georgia Tech would provide added pressure. If the Bulldogs make the SEC title game, but enter it 10-2, losing could mean exclusion from the CFP. Additionally, if the Yellow Jackets defeat the Bulldogs, and Alabama and Texas A&M remain unbeaten in conference play, Georgia's final record of 10-2 would put it on the fringe of the play-off.

Georgia mostly controls its own destiny for the conference championship and playoffs. Not only would a top-15 win over Texas bode well for its resume, but winning out, and receiving a little help from the Longhorns in rivalry week, could help the Bulldogs play deep into winter.



Georgia linebacker C.J. Allen talks with media members during the 2025 SEC Media Days on July 15, 2025, at the College Football Hall of Fame in Atlanta. PHOTO/ETHAN GREENE

NUMBERS TO KNOW: Week 12

#1

Georgia wide receiver Zachariah Branch

Branch has stepped up as the alpha wide receiver for the Bulldogs after fellow wide-out Colbie Young went down with an injury in the Ole Miss game. Since that game, Branch has recorded 18 receptions for 180 yards. He has solidified himself as one of college football's most dangerous players and could be in for a big game against the Longhorns' pass defense, which ranks 12th in the SEC.

Texas offensive tackle Trevor Goosby

Standing at 6-foot-7, 312 pounds, Goosby is a commanding force on the Longhorns' offensive line, a unit that has dictated the team's success at times this year. The Longhorns are allowing just 1.5 sacks a game in wins and 3.5 sacks in losses this year. If Goosby and the offensive line can keep quarterback Arch Manning upright against a Georgia defense that ranks last in the SEC in sacks, they will put themselves in a good position to win.

#74

Georgia cornerback Daylen Everett

#6

Everett has become one of the Bulldogs' most reliable players in the secondary and will play a key role in stopping Manning and the Longhorns' passing attack, which averages 246.1 yards per game. Last season, he forced a fumble and had an interception in the Bulldogs' regular-season matchup with Texas, and followed that up with two interceptions in the SEC championship — a performance that earned him MVP honors for that game.

Texas linebacker Anthony Hill Jr.

Hill is a leader in the Texas defense and a projected first-round pick in next year's NFL draft. He leads the team with over 60 tackles and is tied for second with 6.5 tackles for loss. He is one of the main reasons the Longhorns have the best run defense in the SEC, allowing just 78.7 yards per game, and will play a big role in trying to stop the Bulldogs, who run the ball more than 42 times a game.

#0

Georgia tight end Oscar Delp

#4

Delp has slightly underperformed, with just 14 receptions for 199 yards and one touchdown, which he scored last week against Mississippi State. He has been an excellent blocker, which has helped Georgia's run game, but this matchup could be a breakout game for the senior as a pass catcher. The Longhorns have given up 16 receptions for 247 yards and four touchdowns in the past two games to tight ends, so look for Delp, who made two crucial overtime catches against Texas in last year's SEC championship game, to be more involved this game.

Texas punt and kick returner Ryan Niblett

Niblett has been one of the unsung heroes of the Longhorns this year. He is one of the best punt returners in the nation and a threat to score every time he touches the ball. Niblett averages 24.7 yards per punt return, which leads the nation, and has two punt return touchdowns. The sophomore had clutch punt returns against Kentucky, Mississippi State and Oklahoma, helping the Longhorns win all three of those matchups.

#21

By Liam W. Dreesen

FALL 2025 STAFF

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CORRECTIONS

In the Nov. 6 print edition, on page A3, there was an error regarding the cost of using Fox Den Third Space. We regret this error and it has since been corrected online. 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 quickly as possible. 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.

From emergency sub to ‘phenomenal leader’

Gunner Stockton’s rise during the last Texas game

Owen McDaniel

Not much went right for Georgia’s offense in the first half of the 2024 SEC championship game against Texas. The Bulldogs mustered just 54 total yards, including minus-2 rushing yards. Four of their five drives ended in four plays or fewer, leading to a 6-3 halftime deficit. To add insult to injury, quarterback Carson Beck suffered damage to his UCL on the final play of the half, sidelining him for the remainder of the season. That meant that Georgia would be attempting a second-half comeback against the third-ranked defense in the nation in points and yards allowed per game, with then-redshirt sophomore Gunner Stockton at the helm of the offense.

It wasn’t how the Bulldogs drew up their route to a first-round bye in the College Football Playoff, but Stockton thrives when things go off script. He was met with a roar of support from the Georgia faithful when he trotted onto the field at Mercedes-Benz Stadium at the beginning of the second half, and on his first drive, he scrambled to convert a third down and lowered his shoulder into a Texas defender, galvanizing the Bulldog sideline. Stockton and the offense eclipsed their first-half yardage on their first drive of the second half, only needing 10 plays to march 75 yards — 48 of which Stockton provided. Running back Trevor Etienne punctuated the drive with a 10-yard touchdown run to put Georgia ahead 10-6.

Stockton’s spark spread to the defense as well, which stopped Texas on its next two possessions. The Bulldogs took advantage, as Stockton engineered a field goal drive to extend the lead to seven points. However, the Longhorns stampeded back, scoring a touchdown early in the fourth quarter to tie the game up at 13. Stockton responded by leading a 16-play, 72-yard drive on which Georgia picked up five first downs to get well into field goal range for kicker Peyton Woodring, who put the Bulldogs back ahead 16-13 with 4:32 remaining.

“[Stockton’s] a phenomenal leader, he made some good plays and I think everybody else rose up around him.

KIRBY SMART | HEAD COACH

Georgia quickly got the ball back in Texas territory thanks to a Daylen Everette interception, but Stockton’s inexperience showed for the first time. The signal-caller felt pressure from his blind side and tried to throw the ball away. However, his feet weren’t set, and he was throwing from the opposite side of the field, so he couldn’t get enough distance on the pass, which was intercepted by Longhorn cornerback Jahdae Barron. The turnover revitalized the Texas offense, which drove down the field and kicked a game-tying field goal to send the game to overtime.

The Bulldogs held the Longhorns to a field goal on their possession and gave Stockton a chance to redeem him-



Georgia quarterback Gunner Stockton (14) runs with the ball during the 2024 SEC Championship game between Georgia and Texas at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta on Saturday, Dec. 7, 2024. Georgia defeated Texas 22-19 in overtime. PHOTO/LANEY MARTIN

self. He connected with tight end Oscar Delp twice for 13 yards before scrambling up the middle on second-and-8, picking up the first down and then getting met with a hit so vicious it was initially flagged for targeting before a review overturned the call. The force of the collision caused Stockton’s helmet to fly off and his eyes to roll back into his head momentarily, but he quickly came to his senses, got to his feet under his own power and strapped his helmet back on, ready for the next play. The NCAA’s rulebook requires a player whose helmet comes off during a play to sit out the next one, so Stockton went to the sideline. Georgia then clinched the SEC championship on the next play, as Beck reentered the game and handed the ball off to Etienne on a 4-yard touchdown run

“[Stockton] played incredible,” head coach Kirby Smart said. “The players believe in Gunner, they love Gunner. The juice that he brought and the passion and energy ... it gave us an added boost of energy ... I can’t say enough about his toughness, character, whatever you wanna say. The guy’s a phenomenal leader; he made some good plays and I think

everybody else rose up around him.”

Though Stockton’s stat line — 12 of 16 passing for 71 yards with an interception and, excluding sack yards, 26 yards on the ground — didn’t get NFL scouts drooling after the game, the competitive fire that he played with was contagious among the players and got the team behind him. He has improved in many ways since then, but the core of his game has remained constant. He took over as the starter for the 2025 season, and he has steered the team to a 8-1 record, putting his body on the line time after time and staying poised when forced to improvise.

One example of that came on third-and-5 on Georgia’s opening drive against Kentucky, when Stockton dropped back to pass, recognized that all his options were covered, tucked the ball and dove through contact into the end zone to give the Bulldogs the lead. Plays like those have defined Stockton’s era as the starter. With all of the narrow games he has been a part of — from his first game to his rivalry win over Florida two weeks ago — that competitive nature has helped give Georgia the edge.

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1	2	3	4		5	6	7	8		9	10	11	
12					13					14			
15					16					17			
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21	22	23				24	25						
26					27	28				29	30	31	32
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				41	42				43	44			
45	46	47					48						
49					50	51	52				53	54	55
56					57					58			
59					60					61			

ACROSS

1. Buzzkill

5. Buggy for Brits

9. Furbys, once

12. Dog tag info

13. Pro ____

14. Pitching star

15. Chowhounds have big ones

17. Virtual citizen of PC gaming

18. It's tapped

19. Better or best

21. Bakery supply

24. Marathon

26. Dominate, in sports lingo

27. Printer's amount

29. Unrespected writer

33. "The best is ____ to come!"

34. Campaign creators

36. Freight weight

37. Metallurgist's materials

39. Jets or Sharks, e.g.

40. Be outstanding?

41. Is worthwhile

43. Enough, and then some

45. Bridges in Hollywood

48. Itinerary part

49. Cause of inflation?

50. Covetously

56. Ozone hazard, for short

57. Jack and Jill's burden

58. Stead

59. Congressional vote

60. Pound the keys

61. Check

DOWN

1. Chain letters?

2. Sound at the door

3. Hi-fi component

4. Nerdy types

5. Goody two-shoes

6. Snitch

7. Did lunch, say

8. Stone worker

9. Allegro, in music

10. Battery fluid

11. Showroom model

16. Aquarium beauty

20. "That's disgusting!"

21. It has its ups and downs

22. Still-life piece

23. Add to the pot

24. Buddhist priests

25. A comet, to the superstitious

28. Wired

30. Straddling, maybe

31. Hooded garment

32. Baby bouncer?

35. Dame Marsh of mystery

38. Cloak-and-dagger sort

42. Masterful

44. Stake drivers

45. Delicate, in a way

46. Board game or magazine

47. Bicolor sea predator

48. Beneath contempt

51. Dissenter's word

52. Big shot

53. Canine command

54. "Malcolm X" director

55. Music to the cook's ears

Highlights from the Nov. 1 game against Florida



PHOTOS/KATHERINE DAVIS





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Georgia's defensive line faces Texas' offensive line at Darrell K Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium in Austin, Texas, on Saturday, Oct. 19, 2024. Georgia won 30-15. PHOTO/LANEY MARTIN

Blue-blood battle

Built in the SEC vs. built for the SEC

Braden Brownell

Nov. 15 will deliver one of the season's most anticipated matchups as Georgia hosts Texas for the first time in program history. It's the third meeting since the Longhorns joined the SEC in 2024 — and a chance for Georgia to even the all-time series at 4-4.

A battle between football giants

Georgia has become the modern model for sustained success in college football — never rebuilding, always reloading. Texas arrived in the SEC in 2024 carrying the weight of its own blue-blood tradition: history, money, recruits and expectation.

For Georgia, the current standard is championships. The Bulldogs' recent national titles turned Kirby Smart's program into the measuring stick for the rest of the league. Since 2017, Georgia is 51-2 at home. The 2024 senior class finished 25-0 in Sanford Stadium. Even in what was considered a "down year," the Bulldogs went 10-2, won the SEC and reached the College Football Playoff.

This season, Georgia is 7-1, ranked fifth nationally and averaging 32.5 points per game while allowing 19.6. Quarterback Gunner Stockton has led several dramatic comebacks, including an overtime victory at Tennessee after erasing a 21-7 deficit. Smart has earned a reputation for manufacturing urgency — creating underdog narratives even when his team is ranked near or at the top of the nation.

Texas entered the SEC with swagger and financial muscle. The Longhorns are the most valuable program in college football, worth an estimated \$2.38 billion, per a report from The Athletic.

"At the University of Texas, part of the standard is competing for championships," Texas head coach Steve Sarkisian said at the SEC Media Days in 2024. "I'm up here talking about football, but it's at every sport. It's at every level. Regardless of the conference."

In their first year in the league, the Longhorns nearly lived up to it. Texas went 11-2 and

faced Georgia twice — once in the regular season and again in the SEC championship. Both games were tight. Georgia won both, including a 22-19 overtime finish in Atlanta. Those losses made one thing clear: to become what it believes it should be in the SEC, Texas has to get through Georgia.

The start of 2025 tested the Longhorns. After opening with a 14-7 loss at Ohio State and dropping its SEC opener on the road to Florida to fall to 3-2, Sarkisian pushed back against criticism.

"I mean, take the other — how many teams are there in college football, 136?" Sarkisian said to the media the Monday following the Florida game. "Take the other 135 and have them go play at Ohio State and at 'The Swamp.' See how they do."

Since then, Texas has steadied itself. At 7-2 and ranked No. 10 in the AP Poll, the Longhorns remain in the CFP hunt. First-year starting quarterback Arch Manning has thrown 18 touchdowns and six interceptions, and he's coming off a breakout 328-yard, three-touchdown performance in a 34-31 win over No. 9 Vanderbilt.

This year's matchup is one both teams need to win to keep their SEC title hopes alive, and for Texas to stay firmly in the playoff race.

Recruiting front: Texas invades Georgia's backyard

Perhaps the clearest sign of Texas's SEC arrival hasn't been what's happened on Saturdays, but on signing day.

Two of Georgia's biggest recent recruiting losses — both in-state, both expected Bulldogs — chose the Longhorns instead.

Justus Terry, a five-star defensive lineman from Manchester, Georgia, was considered a foundational Georgia commit for over a year. Texas flipped him in December 2024 after a late push and visit to Austin, Texas. Insiders cited NIL investment and defensive coordinator Pete Kwiatkowski's development as deciding factors.

Tyler Atkinson, a five-star linebacker from Grayson High School in Loganville, Georgia, had visited Athens over a dozen times — more than any other program. Georgia recruited him first, longest and most consistently. In July, he chose Texas.

For Georgia, these weren't just recruiting misses — they were symbols of change. Smart has built his defenses around elite in-state front-seven players. Terry and Atkinson were supposed to be the next ones. For Texas, it's proof of concept. The Longhorns aren't just in the SEC — they're acting like they expect to run it. They're winning battles on Georgia's home turf in recruiting, and on Nov. 15, Texas will try to do the same on the field.

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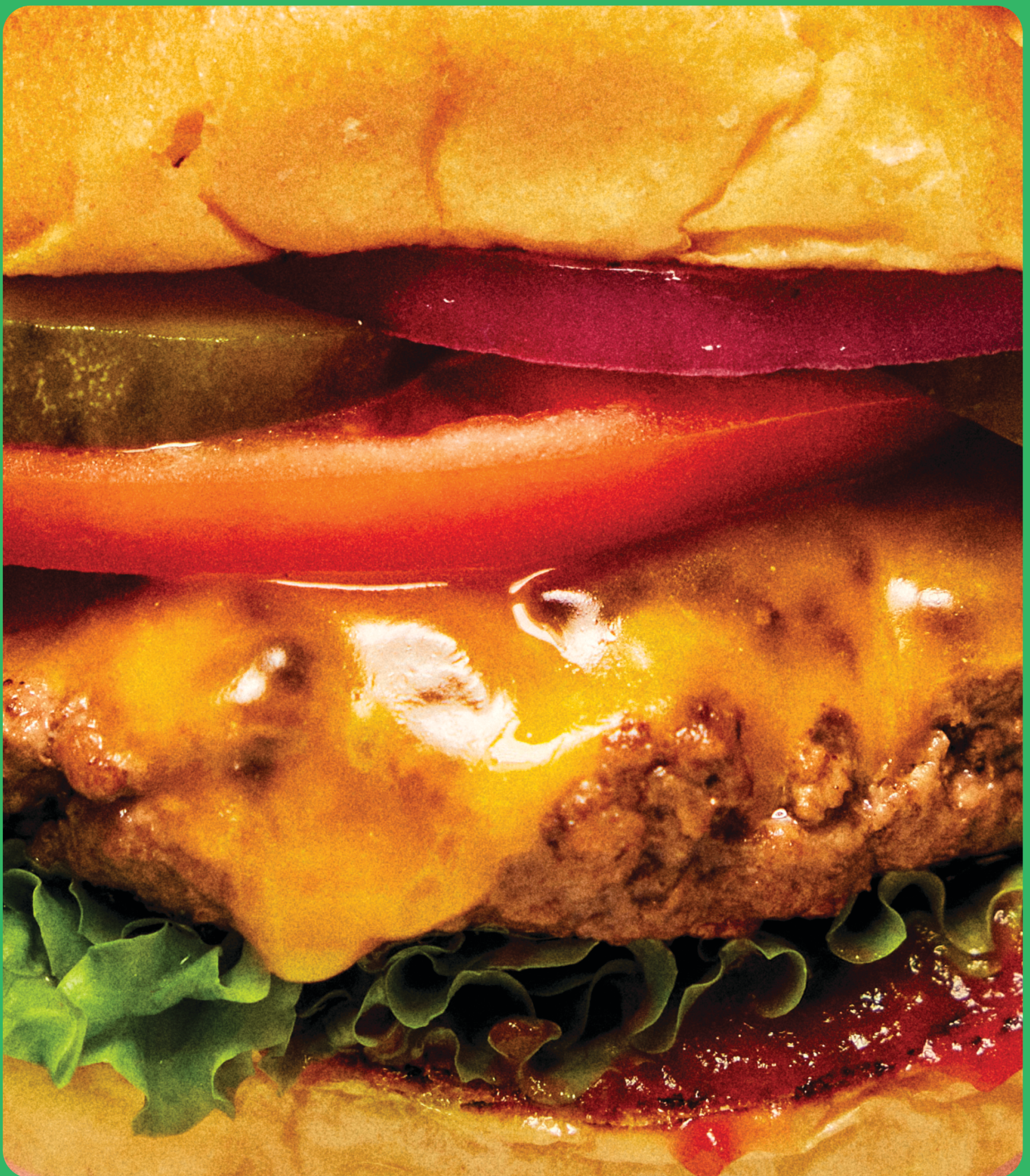
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