DECEMBER 20, 2019

ARTICLES OF INTEREST
DECEMBER 14-20, 2019

NEWS ABOUT

UA SYSTEM CAMPUSES 2

STATE ISSUES 13

OTHER STATE UNIVERSITIES 29

NATIONAL ISSUES 38

SPORTS 70
Alabama-based tornado study gets budget doubled in 2020

By: Paul Gattis

A day after a deadly tornado stormed through north Alabama, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a spending bill that includes a major budget increase for a national tornado study based in Alabama.

VORTEX-SE, a project of the National Severe Storms Laboratory that began in 2016 and brings national tornado researchers to the University of Alabama in Huntsville each spring, will see its budget doubled assuming the spending bill is passed, as expected, by the Senate and then signed into law by President Donald Trump.

Aderholt said up to $10 million has been allocated for the 2020 study, up for annual funding of about $5 million.

It’s a victory for the tornado study that faced being eliminated last spring when there was no money allocated in a proposed budget Trump submitted to Congress in March.

At the time, U.S. Rep. Robert Aderholt, R-Haleyville, said he was working to restore funding to the project for which he has advocated since it began almost four years ago. Aderholt, the top Republican on the House appropriations committee, celebrated funding for the study on Tuesday by saying it will "save lives in the future."

VORTEX-SE, an acronym for Verification of the Origins of Rotation in Tornadoes Experiment. The study is unique in that it focuses on the southeast rather than the Midwest plains where such studies have typically been conducted.

The study based on the southeast is significant in that some tornado researchers – including those at UAH – have come to attach topography and terrain as an influence on tornadoes. And in following that theory, a tornado study on the relative flatlands of Oklahoma may have little relevance to the rolling hills of the southeast.

“This agreement provides for the continued collaboration between NOAA Research and the NSF on the Vortex-SE initiative with an important investment of up to $10 million that I know will save lives in the future,” Aderholt said in a statement to AL.com. "While radar does a great job of detecting storms during their formation and after they have touched down, we still need to know more.

"Specifically, we need to know why tornadoes form and why some areas seem to get hit over and over while other areas just miles away see little to no tornado activity. I envision a future where
this research will give us the opportunity to not just detect tornadoes, but know where they are likely to form minutes or hours ahead of time.”

A husband and wife died in a tornado Monday night in Town Creek – about 18 miles east of Muscle Shoals. The National Weather Service forecast office in Huntsville has confirmed at least three tornadoes touched down in in north Alabama during the wave of storms. Justin Chase Godsey and his wife, Keisha LeeAnn Cross Godsey, were found inside their home on Lawrence County Road 265. Their 7-year-old son, Landen, was being treated at Children’s of Alabama in Birmingham.

In March, 23 people died in a EF-4 tornado that struck Lee County in east Alabama.
Tuscaloosa dedicates bicentennial landmarks on riverfront

By: Mark Hughes Cobb

Minerva flies over the Park at Manderson Landing, launched on the day Tuscaloosa’s bicentennial celebrations drew to a close.

Hundreds turned out for the statue’s dedication Friday, marking 200 years since the city’s incorporation, Dec. 13, 1819, to laud artists and drivers behind the project, roughly three years in the making.

Jimmy Warren of Totalcom Marketing introduced the event, held inside the crew building on the west side of the park, saying "... my two most important titles today ... I’m an alum of the University of Alabama, and I’m a citizen of the city of Tuscaloosa.”

The 30-foot, 9,500-pound sculpture of the Roman goddess of wisdom, art and strategy, designed by Caleb O’Connor, soars atop a reflective mirroring crescent which appears to be bursting upward from rock beneath. Her left foot splashes down as her body strains upward. An owl, wings spread, perches on the wrist of her outstretched right arm, the whole crafting a balancing act that seems to defy gravity.

Fellow artist and sculptor Craig Wedderspoon’s winding river walkway, embedded with key moments from local history, leads a timeline path to Minerva, mimicking bends in the Black Warrior River which flows behind the installation.

The art was a gift to Tuscaloosa from UA, which owns and operates the Park at Manderson Landing. O’Connor’s sculpture was paid from a fund established by an anonymous donor.

Speakers included Mayor Walt Maddox, UA President Stuart R. Bell, and Bicentennial Commission co-chairs Cathy Randall, Tim Parker and Harrison Taylor. The latter three served as grand marshals for the 44th West Alabama Christmas Parade on Friday night, with fireworks at the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater wrapping up the year of bicentennial celebrations.

The city also celebrated underground, burying a time capsule beneath a boulder near the boat house, Warren said, intended to capture life in 2019. Memorabilia sealed inside represents Tuscaloosa through arts and entertainment, infrastructure, education, sports and athletics, civil rights and diversity, he said.

“But for a full reveal of what’s in the capsule, you’ll have to stick around for 50 years,” Warren said, to laughter. “And unlike the last time that we buried a capsule, we know where this one is.”

He hinted that orange traffic cones might be tucked in, a jab at varied ongoing road projects. The mayor batted back playfully.

See Next Page
"Jimmy, in 2069 when that time capsule is opened, I will be in my 17th term as mayor," Maddox said. "I also anticipate that the Lurleen Wallace Boulevard project will be near completion."

On a more serious note, he expressed appreciation for UA’s gifts.

"It goes without saying that the city of Tuscaloosa has no greater partner than the University of Alabama," Maddox said, "whether it’s educating students, whether it’s thousands upon thousands of employees who can pay their mortgage, who can go buy a car, who can put their children through college, the University of Alabama touches our lives here in Tuscaloosa in ways that I don’t even know if we can quantify ..."

Bell noted that, in addition to the bicentennial date, this weekend also marked commencement for 2,200 UA students. When the university was inaugurated April 12, 1831, he said, it consisted of seven buildings and 52 students; 2019’s enrollment is about 38,000, and the institution employs nearly 7,000. Minerva stands central to UA’s official seal.

“There’s one thing about Tuscaloosa: We come together and we celebrate well,” Bell said.

Randall spoke of 2019 as "... a year to remember; a year to look back and to remember 200 years of history, and a year when we’re looking forward to an even better future for every citizen of this great town.”

When Wedderspoon and O’Connor, who’ve collaborated on projects such as the Willie Mays statue at Regions Field in Birmingham, were given the commission, they batted around ideas until they came up with the goddess of wisdom and her 10-foot timeline walk-up, shaped after the Black Warrior River from Demopolis to Tuscaloosa.

“It’s nice to be part of something that’s more permanent in Tuscaloosa, which is definitely my home,” said Wedderspoon, who moved here on joining the UA art faculty in 1999, "... and something that is about the university, but is also for Tuscaloosa.”

The UA professor gravitated toward the environmental portion, adding an educational component with significant events through the Druid City’s past 200 years, beginning with incorporation. Moments of turmoil lay beside rippling effects, such as when Autherine Lucy, Vivian Malone Jones and James Hood successfully integrated UA; riots afterward led The Tuscaloosa News editor and publisher Buford Boone to write a 1A editorial, “What a Price for Peace,” which won the Pulitzer Prize. The arrival of Mercedes, and the return of Paul W. "Bear" Bryant to coach his alma mater, are laid in, as are the 2011 tornadoes, alongside The Tuscaloosa News’ Pulitzer for that storm coverage.

O’Connor was glad for the open-ended nature of the commission. “I love that, because it then gives me an opportunity to think about it, play around with that idea,” he said.

“We could give kind of a face to this symbol of action I wanted to portray,” said O’Connor, who moved to Tuscaloosa 11 years ago to create the federal building murals, and stayed to raise his family.

Wedderspoon and O’Connor also collaborated on a bicentennial project for the state, which incorporated the day after Tuscaloosa, in 16 3-foot-by-2-foot heavy-relief cast bronze panels depicting significant moments in Alabama history, with 18-by-20-inch text panels beneath. They’re to be displayed at a new park across from the Capitol building in Montgomery. While looking over history on that project, he didn’t spot one defining moment that would adequately commemorate the city’s 200th birthday.

“Instead we have something reflective of all those things, the good, the bad and the ugly,” he said. The artist started with visions of a large-scale outdoor figure, up high, “so it would look like they were running in the sky.”

“I wanted to give this image kind of an empowering quality to the viewer, so that you knew you were witnessing something incredible, something fantastic,” symbolizing power and potential, “and I wanted to use a woman because they’re the most adequate symbol of all us, of humankind.” Several UA students served as models for the goddess.

Even on an overcast Friday morning, Minerva stood out and up, its brassy golds, bronzes, silvers and grays cutting through murky skies. Though he’d designed and built the model in his downtown studio -- the final work was cast in Italy -- looking up at Minerva as she flies gave O’Connor a different perspective.

“My first impression was it doesn’t stand out in a bad way,” he said. “I like the reflective quality of the arch, how it incorporated the environment, and I loved the way Minerva looked against the background” of the park and river, the north bank and the trees surrounding.

“I realized at that point I was happy with it, then the anxiety of whether of everyone else would kicked in. So we’re still there,” he said, laughing.

The UA Alumni Association is selling bicentennial ornaments depicting O’Connor’s Minerva, for $24.25 each.
Citrus Bowl tickets a bargain for UA fans, broker says

By: Ken Roberts

The Jan. 1 Citrus Bowl featuring college football heavyweights Alabama and Michigan represents a bargain for University of Alabama fans, says one online ticket broker.

“Despite the classic college football match-up, this is the cheapest Alabama bowl game this decade, as Tide fans have depleted travel budgets over the last five years of playoff games,” said Jesse Lawrence of TicketIQ, an online marketplace.

According to TicketIQ, the average asking price on the secondary market for a Citrus Bowl ticket is $262, which is up 11% since the bowl match-ups were announced.

The “get-in” price is around $75, which still makes this game one of the most expensive Citrus Bowl ticket in the past decade, according to TicketIQ.

UA has tickets for sale on www.rolltide.com priced at $80 for end zone seats and $86 for corner seats.

The Citrus Bowl will kick off at noon Central time on Jan. 1 from Camping World Stadium in Orlando, Florida. ABC will televise the game with Dave Pasch, Greg McElroy and Tom Luginbill providing commentary.

The game pits college football’s No. 1 team in terms of all-time wins, Michigan, against the No. 4 team all-time, Alabama.

Alabama comes into the game with a 10-2 record and a No. 13 ranking. Michigan is 9-3 and ranked No. 14.

The teams have only met four times, with each team winning twice. The two teams last met in the 2012 season opener in Arlington, Texas, with Alabama winning by a 42-14 score.
UAB awarded grant for Atomic Force Microscope

By: Henry Thrornton

The National Science Foundation (NSF) has granted the University of Alabama in Birmingham (UAB) funds to purchase an atomic force microscope.

According to a press release from UAB, the grant, totaling $314,912, will provide the highly advanced microscope for research and education purposes.

“The microscope plays a vital role in student education in the fields of chemistry, materials science, biomedical science and biomedical engineering,” said Eugenia Kharlampieva, Ph.D., professor in the UAB College of Arts and Sciences.

She added, “Educational opportunities are available for undergraduates, graduate students, and postdoctoral fellows on the campus and expand via outreach to local middle and high school students.”

The National Science Foundation is an independent federal agency created by Congress in 1950. Today, the NSF has an annual budget of $8.1 billion. Congress’ stated reasons for creating the NSF were “to promote the progress of science; to advance the national health, prosperity, and welfare; to secure the national defense.”

“A high-caliber research environment is also vital to the regional economy in central Alabama through raising community awareness toward biomedical and soft-materials technologies,” said Richard A. Dluhy, Ph.D., chair of the UAB Department of Chemistry.

UAB asserts that its departments of “Chemistry, Medicine and Biomedical Engineering will benefit from the new microscope.”
How Birmingham has changed as a result of UAB’s 50-year legacy

By: Cary Estes

Several years before he was named the first president of the University of Alabama at Birmingham, Dr. Joseph Volker envisioned what such a school could one day mean to the surrounding city. He conceived a place that would provide innovation, opportunity, and growth galore.

“I see a city and a university and their lights,” Volker said in the 1960s, according to the book “New Lights in the Valley: The Emergence of UAB” by Tennant S. McWilliams. “And where there are no lights right now, I know there will be.”

That prediction certainly has come true in the time since the University of Alabama system was reorganized in 1969 and UAB became a separate, degree-granting institution. Today, as the school celebrates its 50th anniversary, UAB has established itself as one of the brightest lights in all of Birmingham.

With more than 22,000 students and 23,000 employees (including the hospital system), UAB creates an annual economic impact estimated to be in excess of $7 billion. The campus extends across more than 100 square blocks, expansion that at one point earned the school the nickname “The University that Ate Birmingham.” Actually, it was more transformation than consumption, as UAB grew gradually but steadily from a small commuter college to a sprawling world-class university.

“It’s a real testimony to the leadership we’ve had, going all the way back to Joseph Volker,” says Dr. Michael Saag, director of the UAB Center for AIDS Research. “They set a foundation to encourage a certain amount of risk-taking and entrepreneurship, and to trust in the quality of people who were here.” Saag discovered that type of attitude at UAB not long after he began his training in internal medicine at the school in 1981. That was the same year the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued its initial report on HIV and AIDS.

Saag noticed he was seeing an increasing number of patients with this new disease. So after less than a year at UAB, he met with Dr. Claude Bennett, Chair of the Department of Medicine, to propose starting an HIV outpatient clinic at the university.

“They were willing to invest in an idea from a trainee, and trusted me to run this without wringing their hands,” Saag says. “They were making a leap of faith that I could pull it off. And most importantly, they had a genuine understanding of the need for such a clinic to exist. The fact that leadership got it so quickly and so completely was magical. That sort of thinking is really what propelled UAB forward.”
It was one of the many steps that helped UAB emerge from its rather humble beginnings. The university had fewer than 5,000 students in the early days, and most of them lived off-campus. There was no true rah-rah collegiate atmosphere, no ivy-draped halls dripping with history. Just a small group of ordinary-looking buildings where classes were held for students who often were juggling classwork with careers and families.

“When I started here in 1971, most of our student body was full-time employed and they came to school at night,” says business professor Joseph Van Matre, the longest-serving professor at UAB. “That first year, I taught a class that lasted from 6 to 10 on Friday night. Friday night! Nobody believes me when I tell them that. Now, nearly everybody is a full-time student, and we have a lot of international students. But back then, it was mainly just people from around the city taking classes after work.”

Indeed, for most of the 1970s and well into the 1980s, UAB remained a relatively small university that still was experiencing plenty of growing pains. For example, after Linda Lucas became the first Ph.D. graduate from UAB’s newly formed Department of Biomedical Engineering (BME), she joined the faculty in 1982 as an assistant professor. Lucas was part of a staff of five BME faculty members whose offices were located in the dreary basement of Cudworth Hall.

“It was a truly terrible space,” says Lucas, who went on to serve as Dean of the School of Engineering, as well as University Provost, before retiring in 2017. “It would have been hard to believe 40 years ago when I was sitting in that basement office that all this would happen. What they’re doing in some of the research areas now is just incredible. It’s really amazing how much everything has grown.”
Alabama student to compete in Miss America pageant

By: Ken Roberts

A University of Alabama student will compete for the title of Miss America on Thursday.

Tiara Pennington, a 21-year-old Helena native, is in New Haven, Connecticut, where this year’s pageant will be held at the Mohegan Sun Arena. NBC will broadcast the Miss America competition beginning at 7 p.m. Central time Thursday.

Pennington, a political science major at UA, earned the title of Miss Alabama in June.

In an interview with Tuscaloosa News last summer, she said she will do everything she feels needs to be done to make a good impression on a national stage.

“I want to make sure I represent the state of Alabama as well as I possibly can,” she said.

Pennington’s mother, Dedra Eastland Pennington, competed in the Miss Alabama pageant in 1986.

“There is nothing compared to seeing your own daughter crowned,” Dedra Eastland Pennington said. “It was like an out-of-body experience.”

Tiara Pennington’s social impact initiative is the National Psoriasis Foundation and Psoriasis Take Action Alabama.

Tiara Pennington was the first black woman to earn the Miss University of Alabama title before earning the crown of Miss Alabama. She’s the second black woman to earn the Miss Alabama crown. The first was Kalyn Chapman in 1993.
UA researchers seek volunteers for severe weather study

By: Stephanie Taylor

Researchers at the University of Alabama are looking for volunteers to take part in a study about severe weather events.

Households that participate will be interviewed before, during and after severe weather events during the upcoming spring and fall severe weather seasons.

The tornado research being conducted across the Southeast is part of a broader study called Vortex SE 2019, and is meant to gain an in-depth understanding of the vulnerabilities communities face when taking action during severe weather events.

“There’s never been research on what actually happens in a home when they first become aware of pending weather,” said Laura Myers, director and senior research scientist of UA’s Center for Advanced Public Safety, who is leading the project. “We want to observe how they get their weather alerts, what they do when they get it, do they have a plan, when do they enact their plan, when do they think they are safe and so on.”

UA students trained by CAPS researchers will conduct the interviews and observe the volunteer households. The students will contact participants when severe weather is forecast.

If a 10-day outlook predicts severe weather, for example, the student would contact the participants to determine when they were made aware. The communication would continue as the forecast evolved, and the researchers would visit the household to observe during the hours leading up to the event.

“We hypothesize that people prepare more than we might think,” Myers said. “That’s why it’s important to watch it actually evolve in a real event.”

The study wants to capture differences in risk perception among people forecast to encounter severe weather and capture when weather alerts spur people to prepare, if at all, Myers said. Researchers will take note of each household for factors such as knowledge of how to prepare for severe weather, past experience with severe weather and the tools used to receive weather alerts.

The results will be reported to NOAA and Vortex-SE programs to share the data with weather professionals to improve distribution and communication of tornado warnings. Findings will also be published in academic journals and books.
England, not Worley, certifies list of Alabama Democratic primary candidates

By: Mike Cason

There is still a pending lawsuit over leadership of the Alabama Democratic Party, but for the purpose of who will be on the ballot as Democratic candidates in the March primary, state Rep. Chris England of Tuscaloosa signed the official list.

Today, Secretary of State John Merrill will provide the lists of candidates for both parties to the vendor that prepares the ballots, said Grace Newcombe, press secretary for Merrill.

Deadlines for the parties to send their lists to Merrill and for Merrill to certify the lists are set in state law. The lists from both parties are attached to the end of this article.

The Democratic Party dispute is between factions backing England and Nancy Worley. England was elected to replace Worley as chair at a Nov. 2 meeting of the State Democratic Executive Committee.

Worley, who was first elected chair in 2013, maintains that meeting was not valid. She and her backers tried unsuccessfully to block the meeting with a lawsuit. The case is now with the Alabama Supreme Court, which has not ruled on Worley’s assertion that she remains the chair or whether the court has jurisdiction over the matter.

The Democratic National Committee recognizes England as party chair.

One of the responsibilities of the party chair that’s spelled out in state law is to certify candidates for the primary no later than 82 days before the primary. England sent in the list on Dec. 11 and an amended list on Wednesday.

Newcombe said Worley did not send in a list.

Montgomery County Circuit Judge Greg Griffin held a hearing in Worley’s lawsuit on Dec. 5. After the hearing, Barry Ragsdale, an attorney who represents England and other defendants in the case, said England and his backers controlled the daily operations of the party and the website. Ragsdale said a bank had frozen the party’s account because of the dispute but that the change in leadership was leading to a surge in raising additional funds.

Griffin did not make a ruling in the dispute, noting that it was already at the Supreme Court.

A. Wesley Pitters, an attorney who represents Worley, said after the Dec. 5 hearing that the Supreme Court should return the case to Griffin for a hearing on who is the duly-elected chair of the party.
‘Saban Center’ to house library, museum

By: Jason Morton

For the city’s 200th birthday, Nick and Terry Saban gave the children of Tuscaloosa a $1.25 million gift.

With a $250,000 pledge from the Nick’s Kids Foundation and another $1 million donation from the family, the Sabans will kickstart the funding of a new, state-of-the-art interactive learning center that will offer science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs, theater, literature and outdoor recreation.

“In recognition of this unparalleled generosity, this place of learning and discovery will be forever known as the Saban Center,” said Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox in announcing the project. “Tuscaloosa is in competition with the world, and our children deserve an opportunity to compete.”

Maddox announced the Saban Center on Friday, the 200th anniversary of the city’s founding, during the annual Nick’s Kids Foundation Teacher Excellence Awards Luncheon, for which he was serving as keynote speaker.

The more than 100,000-square-foot complex will replace what is now The Tuscaloosa News building with a retrofitted and overhauled facility that will serve as home to the Tuscaloosa Public Library, the Children’s Hands-On Museum and the Tuscaloosa Children’s Theater.

It also will feature an outdoor park component across Jack Warner Parkway between the Tuscaloosa Amphitheater and the Hotel Indigo.

“It’s an honor for us to be a part of this new learning center, an honor for our family, our family’s legacy for what we’ve tried to accomplish, not only at the University of Alabama in the football program, but also a part our community,” Saban said Friday at the conclusion of the event, which honors teachers in the Tuscaloosa community. “This is going to be a hub for a lot of educational matters, whether it’s a children’s museum, a library, lecture halls (and) classrooms and will probably draw people to our community in a lot of ways. ...”

“I think this is great for our community and something Terry and I are really, really excited about. Thank you very much, God bless you and Roll Tide.”
Going beyond the ‘traditional’ means of recruiting

By: Brad Newman

As recently reported, Tuscaloosa County’s unemployment rate is now 2.1%; that’s well below the national average of 3.6% and below the Alabama state rate of 2.8%. This is both good and bad news for our region. As plant manager of ZF Chassis Systems Tuscaloosa, Alabama’s Manufacturer of the Year, I understand ZF must go beyond the ‘traditional’ means of recruiting to find the right people.

This means to recruit and train our world-class production workforce, we work with proved state-supported projects like On-the-Job-Training (OJT) and Work-Based Learning (WBL). This also means developing new avenues to reach underserved populations and positively impact the community. We work diligently in the areas of prisoner re-entry and juvenile delinquents with involvement of key stakeholders like the state of Alabama, nonprofits and many others. The industry-led approach is working.

For professional staff, the initiative I’m most proud of is our Interns and Young Professionals program. IYP is a cross-functional team spanning from engineering to finance that works together to promote ZF through community volunteering and campus outreach, while also focusing on their functional roles, and mentoring. IYP has been so successful that area companies have created their own programs in its likeness; and I’m proud to say ZF Tuscaloosa’s last five professional hires have come from IYP.

Personally, I believe workforce development is more than recruiting the “best” employees. Whether an IYP member stays with ZF, or a former prisoner lands with us, it’s about helping others. Often, when we help others, they become more than exceptional employees… they become family. And at ZF Tuscaloosa I’m extraordinarily proud of the family we’ve built.
With focus on past and future, Alabama wraps up bicentennial

By: The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — Alabama blew out 200 candles on its birthday cake Saturday, as officials and residents gathered to celebrate the state’s bicentennial in Montgomery.

Gov. Kay Ivey spoke and a series of monuments picturing the state’s history were unveiled in a park across the street from the state capitol.

“It’s such a brief time in the history of the world,” the Republican Ivey told those gathered outside the capitol. “And yet, during these many years that parallel the life of our great state, Alabamians have been at the forefront of so many pivotal events that have shaped not only America, but also the world.”

The 16 bronze plaques, each on a base of Alabama granite, depict scenes from the state’s history. State Sen. Arthur Orr, a Decatur Republican who has chaired the bicentennial celebration, said the bronze reliefs focus on ordinary people, showing “history is made every day by people like us.”

Alabama was admitted as the 22nd state on Dec. 14, 1819. Orr noted it was not only the 200th anniversary of the state, but the 170th anniversary of the fire that destroyed the first state capitol building constructed after the seat of government moved to Montgomery from Tuscaloosa.

Orr noted that outside the second building, which stands today, Jefferson Davis took his oath of office as president of the Confederacy in 1861, George Wallace delivered an inaugural in which he proclaimed “segregation forever” in 1963, and then only two years later, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke at the end of the Selma to Montgomery voting rights march. In that speech on the back of a flatbed truck, King famously asked: “How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

Orr said Alabama’s history is “marked by much that is good, but also scarred entirely too much by that which is not.” He urged Alabamians to build on their past but not be bound by it.

“Although history shaped who we are today, it does not control our future,” Orr said. “As we begin Alabama’s third century this very day, our future is in our hands.”

As part of the program, Ivey said she received a letter written by then-Gov. Albert Brewer in 1969. She said she in turn would be writing a letter to her successor in 2069 to be sealed in a new time capsule the city of Montgomery is creating “We are continuing forward the legacy of our great state and continue to seek ways to make Alabama even better,” Ivey said.

Over the prior two years, the state has held celebrations in all 67 counties. Saturday’s events included a parade up Dexter Avenue featuring a bus similar to the one Rosa Parks rode on when she was arrested and sparked the Montgomery bus boycott. There also was a moon rover replica commemorating Huntsville’s contributions to the space program, and a 150-member bicentennial all-star band that played a song composed for the occasion.
Common Core math ‘eradicated,’ Ivey says, after Alabama school board vote

By: Trisha Powell Crain

The controversial Common Core is no more, at least where math is concerned, according to Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey.

The state school board today voted 5 to 3 to approve a new math course of study for K-12 students in public schools.

“I think this course of study eradicated any relevance to Common Core,” Ivey said, after the meeting. “It was developed by Alabama teachers for Alabama students.”

Yet many of the conservative opponents of the new standards that spoke during a public hearing today disagreed with Ivey, saying the new standards still look just like Common Core. Former state school board member Betty Peters and Alabama Eagle Forum President Becky Gerritson were among the opponents.

Supporters said the new standards are aligned to the math framework tested on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, where Alabama’s students were ranked last in the nation in math scores.

State Superintendent Dr. Eric Mackey told AL.com this is the first time the Alabama course of study considered the NAEP framework.

The vote came one year after Ivey sidelined a previous proposal to change the math children learn in school after opponents said it looked too much like Common Core.

Today those opposing the new standards said not only are they too much like Common Core, national standards first adopted in 2010, but the loss of focus on “classical” math has hurt the state’s students. Parents and grandparents have struggled to help students with math homework because of the techniques beyond memorization that are used to determine answers to math problems.

Supporters said the new math standards support the practical application of math, not only memorization of tables and formulas. Additionally, Mackey said the memorization of multiplication tables, its absence in the current course of study serving as a common foible for Common Core opponents, has been added back. He noted that schools were still teaching multiplication tables even without it being spelled out.

During the public hearing, educators from across the state, including some who served on the committee that created the standards, asked the board to vote yes.

See next page
Just before the vote, Bell, a Republican who has served on the state school board since 1995, asked for another delay, saying the board had not yet seen a final version of the course of study as changes continued to be made. Bell, along with Jackie Zeigler and Dr. Wayne Reynolds, voted no.

Board member Dr. Yvette Richardson a Democrat who represents a district which includes Birmingham, called a no vote “a slap in the faces” of the teachers and other experts who served on the committee.

Supporters of the new standards erupted in applause after Richardson’s remarks. Richardson, Dr. Cynthia McCarty, Tracie West and Jeff Newman, along with Ivey, voted to approve the new standards.

Schools can choose to use the new math standards next fall if they want to, but implementation will not be mandatory until the start of the 2021-22 school year.

During the work session that followed the meeting, Mackey said they are considering expediting the process to adopt textbooks and other curricular materials. The board appointed a textbook committee last year, he said, but that they may have to appoint new members if some of those appointed are no longer able to serve.

Mackey told AL.com that getting the right materials and ensuring all math teachers receive training on teaching the new standards are top priorities for state education officials. Better systems of training have been developed since the 2010 course of study was implemented, and he is hopeful that more math coaches, who work directly with teachers, will be funded by lawmakers next year.

After the board meeting, Ivey reiterated her support for Amendment One, up for a vote in March, which would eliminate the elected state school board and give Ivey the ability to appoint new board members, subject to confirmation by the Senate. The amendment also requires the new state school board to replace Common Core standards which, according to Ivey, at least in math, has now been done.

There is a current vacancy on the state school board, as Ivey has not appointed anyone to replace Ella Bell, a Democrat whose district included much of the state’s Black Belt region and a large portion of Montgomery county, who died in November.

“Over the past 22 months, a committee of esteemed education and business leaders have developed a revised Mathematics Course of Study that replaces, once and for all, Common Core with Alabama-designed standards,” Ivey said in a press release. “I am proud that the Alabama State Board of Education has taken this bold step to move our state forward. We have a ways to go, but today is a start in the right direction.”
2019: A Year to Remember!

By: Tim Parker, Cathy Randall, Harrison Tyler

In remembering the yearlong celebration of Tuscaloosa’s 200th birthday that culminated on Dec. 13, so many faces come to mind: of our great Mayor Walt Maddox who gave the charge in 2016 to begin the plans, of the dozens of the most prominent institutional and business leaders who gave financial support so that the celebration would be worthy of this great city and open to everyone, of the hundreds of volunteers who gave so selflessly of their time and energy to create memories for a lifetime, and of the thousands of citizens who participated to make 2019 truly a year to remember.

But today, it is the faces of the members of the Tuscaloosa Bicentennial Commission that shine most brightly in the memory:

• Lyda Black, adjunct professor at Shelton State Community College, who as secretary ensured the efficiency of the commission’s work and preserved a record of its business;

• Bob Ennis, retired city of Tuscaloosa attorney, who renewed his law license in order to lead the Legal Committee and then gave priceless hours of legal advice;

• Kari Frederickson, former chair of the University of Alabama’s History Department, who somehow took time from writing a groundbreaking biography of Alabama’s Bankhead family as well as from a full-time teaching load to lead the Education Committee that produced a walking tour app, a book of art and literature created by Tuscaloosa’s school students, and the Tuscaloosa Through Time expo attended by all 10,000plus school students in the city;

• Shelley Jones, former chair of the city Board of Education, who led the Community Engagement Committee that initiated, coordinated or supported dozens of affiliate activities, including the For the Love of Our City cleanup, the paddlewheel boat race, the Heritage Festival recognizing African-American Trailblazers, the Tuscaloosa Sings Birthday Eve concert, the What’s Your Story musical, the Discovering Alabama film, etc.;

• Elizabeth McGiffert, attorney and prominent civic leader, who not only led the major official events such as the Community Book Experience with Dr. Frederickson, the dedication of Bicentennial Square at Government Plaza, the launch ceremony, the Bicentennial Bash, and Dec. 13’s unveiling of the bicentennial sculptures/dedication of the time capsule/parade/birthday party and fireworks, she enlivened hundreds of affiliate events and even the committee meetings with her personal gifts of goodies;

• Pam Parker, UA’s retired vice president for Advancement, who contributed her formidable fundraising expertise to ensure support for more experiences that were even originally imagined, all open to the public, and then continued to volunteer to ensure that every activity was worthy of the most generous donors;
• Kellee Reinhart, vice chancellor for the UA System, whose expertise in public relations is priceless and who somehow found time to share it generously and masterfully so that the entire citizenry would be invited and included in every activity;

• Don Staley, president/CEO, and Sarah Elizabeth Omms, director of Strategic Operations, for Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports, who directed the Druid City Music Festival co-sponsored by the Bicentennial and led the incredible staff that supported and made possible such an enormous undertaking otherwise led by volunteers.

This Dream Team came together and selflessly contributed thousands of hours out of sheer gratitude to this city. That Tuscaloosa’s Bicentennial was a Year to Remember is due in such large part to them. *Tim Parker, Cathy Randall and Harrison Taylor are co-chairs of the Tuscaloosa Bicentennial Commission.*
Birmingham attorney nominated by Trump to serve as federal judge

By: Ivana Hrynkiw

An Alabama lawyer has been nominated by President Donald Trump to serve as a federal judge.

The president released a list Wednesday of his judicial and United States Marshal nominees. Included in the nominations is Anna M. Manasco, who was tapped to serve as a judge on the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Alabama.

Manasco is currently a partner at Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP in Birmingham, where she focuses on trial strategy and appeals in complex commercial litigation, according to a press release. Manasco has represented clients before the U.S. Supreme Court, federal appeals courts, and the Alabama Supreme Court.

Prior to joining Bradley, Manasco served as a law clerk to Judge William H. Pryor Jr. on the U.S. Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals. The Montgomery native attended Emory University, the University of Oxford, and Yale Law School. At Yale, she served as an executive editor of the Yale Law & Policy Review, according to the press release.

Trump’s other nominees included Thomas T. Cullen to serve on the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Virginia; Thomas L. Foster to serve as the U.S. Marshal for the Western District of Virginia; and Michael Allen Hagar to serve as the U.S. Marshal for the Eastern District of Arkansas.
Alabama company purchased for $1.65 billion

By: Carten Cordell

One of Alabama's most successful defense companies has been acquired for more than $1 billion.

Leidos Holdings Inc. (NYSE: LDOS) will purchase Huntsville-based defense contractor Dynetics Inc. in a $1.65 billion cash deal.

The purchase will give Leidos with a foothold in the emerging hypersonic, directed energy weapons and rapid prototyping markets and comes on the precipice of a potential funding deal on Capitol Hill for the rest of fiscal 2020.

"Dynetics is very well aligned with the priorities in the stated strategy of the Defense Department," Leidos Chairman and CEO Roger Krone said on a conference call outlining the deal Tuesday. "And therefore, the funding that we see on the appropriations bill is very well aligned with the programs and the capabilities that the company has."

According to AL.com, Dynetics has more than 2,300 employees and the deal created a number of new millionaires.

It was Dynetics’ technical capabilities in a number of areas attractive to the DOD that helped draw Leidos’ interest, namely offerings in space, directed energy, artificial intelligence & machine learning, microelectronics and hypersonics, which Leidos chief financial officer Jim Reagan said accounts for 25% of the company’s portfolio.

“As a percentage, it looks like it has been growing nicely, and we think it is going to continue to drive some significant growth into the future,” he said.

Dynetics recently partnered with Lockheed Martin Corp. (NYSE: LMT) in August on a $347 million contract as part of the Army’s Long-Range Hypersonic Weapon (LRHW) systems integration project.

It also inked a $352 million contract as the first company to commercially produce the Common-Hypersonic Glide Body (C-HGB), which allows hypersonic missiles to maneuver in flight at speeds in excess of Mach 5 — another project in which it partnered with the Bethesda defense giant, in addition to work on directed energy weapons systems.
Successes like those have helped the Huntsville company sustain a more than 20% compound annual growth rate, or CAGR — the year-over-year growth rate of an investment — for the past three years.

Reagan said Leidos projects that Dynetics will provide approximately $1 billion of annualized revenue and $110 million of adjusted earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortization (EBITDA) in 2020 with minimal cash synergies, due to Dynetics’ low capital expenditures.

And because it’s positioned for in multiple growth markets for defense, has existing facilities and relationships in the defense sector, Reagan said there’s potential for strong margin growth in the future as Dynetics’ contracts shift beyond their current prototype work.

“They definitely have a margin profile that’s better than the average for legacy Leidos,” he said. “The area where they are going to see even more margin expansion going forward is going to be as the move into production and out of prototyping for some of the product sets they have.”

Krone said that when the deal closes, currently projected for the first quarter of 2020, Dynetics will operate as a fourth business segment alongside its Defensive Solutions, Civil and Health businesses and will be led by current CEO David King.

Leidos will finance the deal with a mix of cash on hand and incremental debt of an estimated $1 billion to $1.1 billion and will have an estimated leverage ratio — its measure of debt to equity — of 3.1x.

The deal marks Leidos’ first acquisition since its August buy of Philadelphia-based IMX Medical Management Services.
Pete Turnham epitomized the Greatest Generation

By: Kenny Jacoby


As Brokaw says, “They will have their place in the ledgers of history, but no block of marble or elaborate edifice can equal their lives of sacrifice and achievement, duty and honor as monuments to their time.”

Pete Turnham of Auburn passed away on September 30, 2019. Mr. Pete epitomized the best of the greatest generation. He was three months shy of 100 when he transitioned to be with his maker and his beloved wife, Kay, who preceded him in death in 2016. While on earth, he lived every day to the fullest. He truly made a difference during the century he was here.

Mr. Pete represented Auburn and Lee County in the Alabama House of Representatives from 1958 to 1998. This is the longest tenure in state history. Due to his longevity and tenure in the Legislature, Mr. Pete became known as the “Dean of the House.”

Like many of the greatest generation, Pete served in World War II. Pete shipped off to Europe during the war earning distinction in battle as a Bronze Star Medal and Valor award winner under the command of the famed General George Patton in the Third Army. His assignment at the end of the war was as a company commander of troops guarding the priceless art stolen and stored by the Nazis at Neuschwanstein Castle. This story was the subject of a famous movie entitled, “The Monuments Men.” You might say that George Clooney played the part of Pete.

Pete came home, raised his family and built a legacy in his beloved Auburn. Like many ambitious men of the greatest generation, Pete became successful in business. However, Mr. Pete is best known for his 40 years of service in the Alabama Legislature. Most of that time he was on the Ways and Means Committee, which appropriates the state education dollars. He made sure that Auburn University got their fair share of these dollars. He retired as the Dean of the House in 1998.

It was one of the greatest privileges and experiences of my life to sit beside Mr. Pete in the Legislature for 16 years. We became best friends for life. When I arrived as a freshman, 30-year-old legislator in 1982, Pete had already been a representative for 24 years. He had known me as a youngster when I spent my summers paging in the House. When I arrived, Pete took me under his wing and told me I was going to sit by him. Therefore, I immediately left the other
freshmen on the back row and went to a prime seat near the front of the chamber next to the Dean of the House.

You get to know someone well over 16 years. Pete Turnham was the consummate gentleman. I never heard him say a harsh word about anyone or use any profanity.

He loved his wife, Kay, his children, his Baptist Church in Auburn, and Auburn University. He also loved his vegetable garden. True to his agricultural roots, he grew his own produce in his six acres behind his house. Pete’s favorite place was in his vegetable garden where for 65 years he personally attended the planting and harvesting. He had quite a green thumb. His garden was famous and he shared the bounty with friends and neighbors.

Like many great men of that generation, he genuinely loved and cared about people and helping his fellow man. He helped and cared for his folks in Lee County on a daily basis, especially assisting students at Auburn University.

I closely watched Pete helping aspiring students and his constituents. He helped a lot of folks in Lee County and he did it without fanfare, whether it was giving someone down on their luck vegetables from his garden or getting their road fixed. Everything he did was with humility, helpfulness, peace-making efforts and a positive attitude. Pete Turnham was a true Christian gentleman.

Pete Turnham served under nine different governors and nine different House Speakers. He was the only legislator to serve during all the Wallace administrations. Passing at nearly 100 years old in the year of Alabama’s Bicentennial 200th Anniversary, Mr. Pete lived half of Alabama’s history and participated in making much of it.

Pete Turnham was one of the greatest of the Greatest Generation.
Changes sought for ‘Elevate Tuscaloosa’ funding plan

By: Jason Morton

Changes to the Elevate Tuscaloosa capital projects spending plan are needed to fund aspects of the recently announced Saban Center.

The Elevate Tuscaloosa Financial Analysis Subcommittee, which was formed last month to provide spending recommendations on nearly $160 million in capital projects, signed off Thursday on these spending changes during its first official meeting.

While these funding allocations reduced the overall capital spending plan from $161.05 million to $159.8 million, most of the shifts were to account for the property purchase and design of the Saban Center, a new, state-of-the-art interactive learning center that will offer science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs, theater, literature and outdoor recreation.

“With the Saban Center announcement,” said Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox, “now we begin moving forward.”

While all of these budgetary changes must survive scrutiny from both the Elevate Tuscaloosa Advisory Council and, ultimately, the Tuscaloosa City Council, the biggest proposed change is the $17 million reduction in funds allocated for an “Experience Venue.”

Described as a $60 million facility “that will significantly upgrade the experience economy while drawing thousands of tourists each year” in the original Elevate Tuscaloosa plan, the reallocation of $17 million will, Maddox said, achieve the same goal with the Saban Center.

Of the $17 million, $5 million will go toward the construction of River District Park, which is set to be an outdoor recreational component of the Saban Center.

For the Saban Center itself, $8 million is being directed to the purchase of The Tuscaloosa News building – the future home of the Saban Center – with the remaining $4 million set aside for the facility’s engineering and design work.

The reduction of $1.25 million is what was originally slated for the Tuscaloosa Public Library’s Main branch. But with this branch expected to be moving into the Saban Center, this allocation is no longer needed, Maddox said.

Other changes include a $500,000 reallocation from Sokol Park’s original $10 million designation in order to fund part of the Tuscaloosa All-Inclusive Playground, an estimated $4 million facility that’s meant to cater to children with and without special needs on the grounds of Sokol Park.
And another $200,000 is being re-rerouted from the Tuscaloosa National Airport’s upgrades to improving the airport’s runway and hangar.

Funding these projects is the 1% sales tax increase that was recommended by the mayor as part of the Elevate Tuscaloosa plan and adopted earlier this year by the City Council.

Updated projections list the expected revenues off this sales tax hike at $21.32 million in fiscal 2020, with a projected 2% increase each following fiscal year.

Three bond issues totaling almost $130 million are currently forecast to be obtained in fiscal 2021, 2022 and 2023 to fund many of the Elevate Tuscaloosa projects, but delays on certain projects – particularly, those in the parks and recreation category – related to requested studies and master planning procedures could push one or more of those bond issues further into the future, Maddox said.

Yet if some projects come in higher than expected, there’s a contingency for that, as well.

Over the next 10 fiscal years, an undesignated balance of $31.12 million is expected to be available for unforeseen costs and “unexpected opportunities,” as the mayor has described them.

But even that could change, the mayor said, as the Elevate Tuscaloosa subcommittees and the City Council itself reviews and, ultimately, approves the final spending plans.

“To me, this was the most conservative route to take,” Maddox said, “but it doesn’t mean it’s the only route to take.”
Play ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ flies to Madison Square Garden

By: The Associated Press

The hit play “To Kill a Mockingbird” is busting out of Broadway — and dunking at Madison Square Garden.

For one night only in February, the stage adaptation of Harper Lee’s iconic book will be performed exclusively for 18,000 public school children free of charge at the home of the New York Knicks and Rangers. The move marks the first time a Broadway play has been performed at the venue nicknamed “The World’s Most Famous Arena,” which has hosted concerts by members of the Beatles, boxing bouts between Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali and “The Concert for Bangladesh” in 1971.

The play's usual Broadway home is the 1,435-seat Shubert Theatre, where it is routinely sold out and commands an average ticket price of $162. But on Feb. 26, thousands of middle and high school students from all five boroughs will get to see it for free, courtesy of the Scott Rudin-led production and James L. Dolan, the executive chairman and CEO of The Madison Square Garden Company. The tickets are being distributed by the city's education department.

The entire current Broadway cast will be present, led by Ed Harris as Atticus Finch. Harris told The AP he was thrilled by the prospect, especially with such a powerful play. “It is also an honor to be performing ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ in front of thousands of New York City school kids. We know it will be a once-in-a-lifetime event — for all of us,” he said.

“To Kill a Mockingbird” won the Pulitzer Prize in 1961 and has been widely praised as a sensitive portrait of racial tension in 1930s Alabama. Finch is a lawyer called upon to defend a black man falsely accused of raping a white woman. The stage adaptation is directed by Bartlett Sher and written by Aaron Sorkin. Sorkin's other plays include "A Few Good Men" and "The Farnsworth Invention." He won an Academy Award and a Golden Globe Award for his screenplay for "The Social Network." His films include "Steve Jobs" and “Moneyball.”

“To Kill a Mockingbird” won the Pulitzer Prize in 1961 and has been widely praised as a sensitive portrait of racial tension in 1930s Alabama. Finch is a lawyer called upon to defend a black man falsely accused of raping a white woman. The stage adaptation is directed by Bartlett Sher and written by Aaron Sorkin. Sorkin's other plays include "A Few Good Men" and "The Farnsworth Invention." He won an Academy Award and a Golden Globe Award for his screenplay for "The Social Network." His films include "Steve Jobs" and “Moneyball.”

“This is a one-of-a-kind event — 18,000 young people who wouldn’t otherwise be able to afford to see a Broadway play are going to be introduced to American theater,” Sorkin said. “Scott, Bart and our cast, Jim Dolan and Madison Square Garden and the Department of Education are bringing the mountain to Mohammed — and I’m very excited to be a part of it.”

Sorkin’s “To Kill a Mockingbird” adaptation crackles with energy and his trademark soaring language that made hits of “The Newsroom” and “The West Wing.” For the stage, he cut the undergrowth of minor characters from Lee’s book and enhanced others, particularly the maid Calpurnia and Tom Robinson, the man falsely accused of rape.
USA Foundation’s bayfront Brookley site back on market

By: Lawrence Specker

Nearly 300 acres of prime bayfront property adjacent to the Brookley Aeroplex is going back on the market, the University of South Alabama Foundation announced Tuesday.

USA operated a campus called Brookley Center at the site until 2010. The USA Foundation’s purchase of the land for $20 million helped fund a major expansion of USA Children’s & Women’s Hospital. In March 2019 the Foundation announced an agreement in principle with 24/7 Development Partners of Alabama, in which the developer would pay $45 million. Under that plan the Foundation would have retained 31 acres of sensitive wetlands.

However, the foundation announced Tuesday that 24/7 Development partners had decided not to pursue development of the property.

“The University of South Alabama Foundation appreciates the interest shown by 24/7 Development Partners in certain property owned by the Foundation,” a foundation statement quoted board chair John McMillan as saying. “While we are disappointed that 24/7 did not exercise their option to finalize the purchase of the property, commonly known as the ‘Brookley Property,’ we will once again turn our full attention to marketing it for its outstanding development potential.”

“This is a uniquely attractive property, located close to downtown Mobile, the Alabama State Docks, and interstate access,” McMillan said in the foundation release. “Its development by a qualified and responsible developer will greatly enhance the economic vitality of the greater Mobile community and will represent a win-win for the entire community and the University of South Alabama, which the Foundation is chartered to support.”

Leadership of the Mobile Airport Authority had reacted to the 24/7 deal with some frustration. The property could provide room for growth for it and the Mobile area’s developing aerospace industry. The city of Mobile has also expressed interest in acquiring at least some of the property in the past.

MAA President Chris Curry said Tuesday afternoon that the Airport Authority definitely was still interested in the property. “We’ve always talked about that property within the confines of the airport master plan, which we’re working on now,” he said.

Asked if the latest development might lead to a three-way dialogue between the MAA, the city and the USA Foundation, Curry said that was possible.

“I think that is likely,” he said.
The USA Foundation announcement listed several objectives for the property:

- Generating a return on the investment
- Preserving wetlands that make up part of the site
- Contributing to the economic development of the region
- Preserving positive relations with local stakeholders, like the City, the Chamber and the Mobile Airport Authority, among others
- Developing the property in ways that reflect positively on the Foundation and the University
- Capitalizing on the unique qualities of the Brookley site
- Minimizing future maintenance costs and capital outlays
Auburn fraternity suspended for 4 years over alcohol, physical abuse

By: The Associated Press

A fraternity at Auburn University has been suspended for at least four years over sustained allegations of alcohol and physical abuse.

The school launched an investigation into the Delta Zeta chapter of Beta Theta Pi fraternity in September after it received a report of possible misconduct, news outlets report. The chapter was found to have violated the school's code of conduct, anti-hazing policy and student organization social event policy, according to a school statement.

"The activities that led to this result were serious and included alcohol, physical abuse and servitude, many or all of which spanned several years and defied multiple interventions from the university, alumni and General Fraternity," a fraternity statement reads.

The chapter was started in 1964 and had about 164 undergraduate members at the time of its closure, said Martin Cobb, the fraternity director of communication in the statement.

The suspension appears to have first been reported Monday by the school's newspaper, The Auburn Plainsman.

The fraternity has until Dec. 31 to vacate its house. It can request reinstatement beginning in August 2023.
Bond revoked for teen charged in death of Auburn announcer

By: The Associated Press

A teenager charged in a car crash that killed an Auburn University radio announcer and his wife earlier this year went to jail Wednesday after a judge revoked his bond.

Lee County District Judge Russell Bush ordered the arrest of 16-year-old Johnston Edward Taylor during a hearing, and deputies took him straight to jail, news outlets reported.

Tommy Spina, a lawyer representing Taylor, called the decision fair.

Taylor was free on $50,000 bond while charged with two counts of reckless manslaughter in the death of Auburn broadcaster Rod Bramblett and his wife Paula in May. Authorities allege Taylor was driving about 90 mph (145 kph) in a 55 mph (90 kph) zone when he rear-ended the Bramblett s’ vehicle in Auburn.

Prosecutors asked the judge to revoke the bond because Taylor received at least three tickets in November for speeding and reckless driving. In one instance, authorities found marijuana residue in his car, prosecutors said in court documents.

The judge ordered Taylor into rehabilitation, and District Attorney Brandon Hughes said the youth could be transferred from jail to a facility as soon as Monday. The defense could ask to another bond once Taylor completes rehabilitation, he said.

“That’s a long way away,” Hughes told reporters after the hearing.

Spina, the defense attorney, has said he wasn’t aware of Taylor’s traffic tickets last month until Hughes asked the judge to revoke the bond.

“It is hoped that my client will benefit from the opportunity that he’s been given to show that his actions do not define the person that he is,” Spina said in a statement.

Rod Bramblett was Auburn’s football and men’s basketball announcer from 2003 until his death, and he had called baseball games since 1993.
Walt and Ginger Woltosz’s $10 million gift to Auburn football is about ‘Auburn’ over just ‘football’

By: Giana Han

After they announced they were donating $10 million to Auburn for a new football facility, Walt and Ginger Woltosz took a picture with defensive tackle Derrick Brown on the sidelines. Walt Woltosz was stunned at how big Brown is in person.

“His head starts up here somewhere,” Walt Woltosz said, extending his arms well above his own head. “The guy is huge!”

The big guy is also the perfect example of why the Woltoszs decided to donate $10 million to the football program. Brown, who coach Gus Malzahn said should have been a legitimate contender for the Heisman, is projected to be a first-round NFL draft pick. As an NFL player, Brown would represent Auburn nationally, potentially becoming a more widely-known name than many of the school’s successful academics, engineers or scientists.

And, in turn, his notoriety could help fuel Auburn’s recruiting efforts.

“Sports are sometimes the front door to the university,” Woltosz said. “I know many people around the country know the name Auburn University. And they usually think of us as a football school ... But basically sports are a way to attract top talent academically.”

The foundation for generosity

Walt Wolstosz is a 74-year old Auburn alumnus and father of five who loves Chappy’s Deli and brings home half of his muffin to his wife, Ginger, a quiet but incredibly attentive woman.

“Together, they’re a very dynamic couple in a very humble way,” Auburn Athletic Director Allen Greene said. “You wouldn’t know by looking at them that they’re that successful.”

Walt’s also a world-famous astrophysicist who is best known for developing Professor Sir Stephen Hawking’s communication system but has a long list of inventions, innovations and creations under his name. Ginger has been a driving factor behind much of his success and his generosity.

Years before Woltosz got into designing communication systems, he graduated from Auburn with a bachelor’s degree in aerospace engineering and started working at Northrop Services in Huntsville on the space shuttle. His job was to figure out how to get the shuttle from the
launchpad into orbit. While steering the shuttle, they would have to account for the speed of the earth turning and changing aerodynamics as rockets separate, among other things.

The shuttle wouldn’t be launched for another 10 years, but at the time Woltosz was working on it, they were trying to figure out how to get 80-100 more pounds of payload — the amount of cargo a shuttle can carry.

Woltosz was in the Air Force before attending Auburn, and he thought about how he rolled his plane when he wanted to turn. He decided to put the ability to roll into the program and let it run overnight. When he came back the next morning, he had 8,000 pounds of payload.

Woltosz thought he must have done something wrong, but when he checked, he saw that the program took his change and rolled the shuttle over completely. All the calculations worked out. Now, when you see a rocket turn over when it launches, it is because of Woltosz’s discovery.

After getting a masters in administrative science from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and a masters in aerospace engineering from Auburn, Woltosz moved out to California to work in the Air Force Rocket Propulsion Lab.

One day, his secretary, Ginger, came in to ask him for assistance. Her mother had ALS and she could no longer communicate. Ginger wanted to know if Woltosz could find a way to help her speak again.

Woltosz said no. It wasn’t his area of expertise.

Ginger persisted, and, after hearing more of her story, Woltosz finally gave in, bought some supplies at Radio Shack and went with Ginger to meet her mother. Ginger’s mother died before she could benefit from what Woltosz developed, but during Ginger and Woltosz’s trips to visit her, both a marriage and a company were created.

In 1981, Ginger and Walt were married and formed Words+, Inc., together. Four years after forming the company, a physicist reached out to Woltosz asking for assistance in finding a way to help an English physics professor speak again.

“Are you talking about Stephen Hawking?” Woltosz asked. “Let me know if it's Stephen Hawking. I’ll donate whatever he needs.”

That information was confidential but a few days later, the physicist confirmed it was for Hawking who was in an intensive care unit at the time. Woltosz sent something over, but British Customs held the package for three weeks, wondering why someone would send such expensive material for free. By the time they released it, Hawking was out of the ICU, so Woltosz sent over something more advanced. Hawking used it until the day he died, even after Woltosz developed bigger and better systems.

“It became a standard joke between us,” Woltosz said. “Because, ‘Stephen, you’re the only one in the world who’s still using this equalizer system.’ ”

See Next Page
After working with Words+, Inc. for many years, Woltosz decided to see if he could use his computer simulation and modeling skills in health care. He and Ginger started Simulations Plus in 1996, which discovered a way to help drugs absorb into the gastrointestinal tract better.

That company became a public company listed in Nasdaq, growing enough to allow the Woltoszs to make generous donations to the causes they choose, like animal shelters, disaster relief and medical research, and to pursue other passions.

Because of his work with Hawking and other patients with ALS, Woltosz has assisted with documentaries and movies that deal with the subject. Recently, Woltosz decided to pursue his interest in filmmaking by starting a film studio, Iron Compass Entertainment, with his son, Daniel. The father and son pair are currently working on a Bessie Coleman documentary and created a film called, “Do Not Reply,” which won awards at the Orlando Film Festival in October.

With a new passion that he has only just started exploring, Woltosz is nowhere near thinking about retirement – aside from the fact that he plays golf a little more often now.

**Forever a part of the fabric of Auburn**

Woltosz was once one of the Auburn students packed into the stands, cheering on Connie Frederick as he ran a fake punt 84 yards for a touchdown in the 1969 Iron Bowl. He was working hard on his aerospace engineering degree, in no way anticipating all the turns his life would take. When one of his professors told him he probably wouldn’t stay in aerospace engineering, he was taken aback.

“What are you talking about?” Woltosz said. “I just spent all this time and energy getting the two degrees... Of course, I’m going to be an aerospace engineer for the rest of my life. He just smiled. He was a very wise man.”

Woltosz’s career has crossed through four different fields, and he’s found so much success in all of them that Auburn made him one of the graduation keynote speakers for the Fall 2018 commencement ceremony. Woltosz shares his life advice with Auburn students, and he and Ginger also provide the university with support.

For 37 years, Woltosz was “stuck” out in California and could only return for a football game every so often. As his company found more success and he was able to delegate more responsibilities, he and Ginger were able to come to more games. With how hard it is to find a hotel, the Woltoszs decided to buy a game weekend house. Before buying the house, they did their research and found out the house originally belonged to Frederick Biggin, the first dean of architecture.
They knew right then that when they died, they would give it to Auburn University and the school of architecture,” said Vini Nathan, the dean of the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape Architecture.

But then they found themselves coming to Auburn more and more, so they decided to make Auburn their permanent residence. When they found out they couldn’t put a garage on the house, they decided to just donate the house and find a new one.

The house was named the Biggin-Woltosz House on September 5, 2019. After the donation, Woltosz remained involved with the college of architecture, engaging in the projects and providing feedback despite being a college of engineering graduate.

“Walt and Ginger are these kind of extremely enlightened alumni,” Nathan said. “It’s one thing to be generous, as they absolutely are. They are absolutely enlightened. What that means is they are able to have the long term and broad view because they give where they can give the most impact.”

Now, there are more facilities around campus that bear the Woltosz name or were built with their support. They have become firmly entrenched in the community. They love the Gogue Performing Arts Center, and now it has a Woltosz Theater. The engineering research lab is named after them.

They’re huge supporters of different athletics programs, too. As soon as Walt Woltosz heard Bruce Pearl was hired, he bought four season tickets. They’re proud of the nationally-acclaimed equestrian team and supported the new barn that was built. Together with the other lead donor, Suzanne Mott Dansby, they decided to name the building after the coach instead of themselves.

“They don’t just give to something to put their name on it,” Greene said.

The Woltoszs even support the Canine Performance Sciences. Ginger is passionate about animals, and she and Walt like to take time to feed and pet the puppies.

So far, Woltosz has lured one grandchild to Auburn. She’s a sophomore and recently attended her first football game with her grandparents. His 13-year-old granddaughter is an equestrian and also wants to go to Auburn. Woltosz’s hope is to get all seven of his grandchildren to attend so that they draw their parents to the Auburn area, too.

Step onto Auburn’s front porch

After the Woltoszs donated $10 million toward a new football facility, Woltosz said there were people who complained, asking why he’d donate so much to a program that already receives so much funding.

Football has always been Woltosz’s favorite sport, but he’s recently become a bigger supporter of many other Auburn athletics programs. However, the football program provides something the others don’t — the chance to represent Auburn on the biggest stage.
Auburn currently has 45 players on NFL rosters. Just one former Tiger is in the NBA and four are in the MLB, not including minor leagues. When players like Cam Newton or Montravious Adams or Jamel Dean go on to the next level and find success, it brings attention to Auburn.

“(The Woltoszs) are not just throwing money to the wind and seeing where it’s going to land,” Nathan said. “They’re very carefully calibrated and selective about where they put their resources.”

Woltosz feels like people outside the Southeast may not realize how good of an academic institution Auburn is, but they’ve maybe heard of it because of its sports teams. However, to keep up the athletic success, Auburn needs to draw good recruits, which is hard to do when the facilities are outdated.

Woltosz said he didn’t realize that Auburn’s football facilities are decades behind the other SEC schools until he heard Malzahn speak. Apparently, there are entire sections they don’t show recruits for fear of scaring them off.

In order to get the next “Derrick Brown,” Auburn needs to update, and it wanted to raise $30 million to get started. The Woltoszs decided to give the campaign a little jump start. Their donation, as well as the Malzahns’ $2 million donation and several others, put Auburn in a position where it could move onto the design phase for the new football facility.

The academic part of the institution doesn’t begrudge the football program the money at all.

“They’re the front porch of the university,” Nathan said. “I think at some point, we all step back and say it’s not about me, it’s not about my college. It’s about Auburn, and if there’s strength in one area, we are delighted when our athletic programs do well.”

Eventually, the donation will pay off beyond drawing football recruits and affect more aspects of the school. There’s a long-term vision to this.

“There’s a trickle-down effect over the years because a good, well-performing school in sports attracts the academic interest in the school as well,” Woltosz said. “And that eventually leads to the alumni later on who will become successful and provide the updated kind of support that we’re providing now.”
The Importance of a Diverse, Inclusive Community

By: Eli Capilouto and Sonja Feist-Price

Seventy years ago, Lyman T. Johnson became the first African-American student enrolled at the University of Kentucky. He bravely opened doors that were closed to too many, for too long.

Earlier this year, in front of 500 community members at the banquet bearing his name, we shared excerpts from his biography – The Rest of the Dream. They are words darkened by adversity, but illuminated by hope:

“When you say if I don’t like this country then why don’t I leave it, then my classic illustration is: if my house is leaking, I don’t get mad at it and leave it. I just get the ladder and get me some tools and I get up on the house and I patch the leak. And that is what I’m going to do for my country – I love it; I like it. And when I see its imperfections, I’m not going to get mad at it and leave. I’m going to get mad at its imperfections.”

As we think about our next steps in creating a community of belonging – a place where every voice matters – there is both promise and challenge to be found in Johnson’s admonition. The words apply today as much as they did decades ago when he wrote them.

Today, we still feel the sting of racism; our “differences” – often framed around race, identity, ethnicity and orientation – too often are used as a wedge between us, rather than points of distinction to collectively celebrate.

Tremendous progress has undeniably been made over the last several years at UK. But we’ve also experienced the disappointment of moments where our divisions seem to overwhelm us: where our efforts do not fully yield the results we desire.

Two recent conferences held on our campus reflect both the progress we’ve made as well as the work that remains.

Earlier this month, UK served as host for our first Diversity Leadership Summit, sponsored by our Martin Luther King Center and Office of Enrollment Management. More than 500 students from UK, other campuses and high schools across Kentucky came for a daylong series of conversations.

The mission: empowering students to improve their college experiences and provide prospective students with the opportunity to develop their cultural identity and leadership skills.

Only two weeks later, the “Higher E(d)quity Matters” Conference, sponsored by the Council on Postsecondary Education, took place on our campus. It featured speakers and sessions designed
to help campus leaders cultivate environments of belonging, in part by examining barriers that students, faculty and staff still face in our shared journey.

These are examples of our collective commitment, across higher education in Kentucky, to ensure that all of our people—from all backgrounds, perspectives, orientations, identities and ideologies—know that they are valued.

And, indeed, we are proud of the progress we have made at UK:

UK is ranked among the top 25 campuses in the nation for LGBTQ* inclusion and safety by Campus Pride Index.

We celebrate record six-year graduation rates for both underrepresented minority (URM) students and low-income students. Between 2011-12 and 2019-20, for URM students there was a 4.9 percentage point increase; for low-income students, there was a 9 percentage point increase.

A more diverse community is, ultimately, a stronger and more vibrant one.

This progress is encouraging, but we always have more work to do. In the words of Lyman T. Johnson, we must “not let the wagon roll back down the hill.”

For example, even as we are investing more money than ever toward hiring minority faculty—a consistent commitment—our results in this important area have been uneven. Yet, we recognize that all students deserve to see people who look like them at the front of the classroom. Such diversity creates an even richer intellectual campus.

Moreover, our students should expect a place that does not tell them what to think, but instead teaches them how to think critically and communicate effectively. They can expect their goals and aspirations to be taken seriously, and they can expect their ideas to be refined, changed or strengthened.

That’s why conferences like these matter; they underscore our commitment to that work and to candid conversation.

The result will be a campus better equipped to enrich those communities we serve, and to uplift those around us. We will work together, not only to keep the wagon from rolling down the hill, but to ensure it continues an inexorable path upward and forward.

Dr. Eli Capilouto is the president of University of Kentucky.
Feds help star athlete hide rape charges on UO campus

By: Kenny Jacoby

Tristen Wallace had the qualities every college football team wanted.

Tall and strong with blazing speed, he courted offers to quarterback some of the NCAA’s brand-name programs, from Texas Tech to Ohio State.

University of Oregon won him over, signing him to its 2016 freshman class as a wide receiver. But Wallace never took the field for the Ducks.

Within two weeks of his first fall term at Oregon, two female students separately told campus officials that Wallace raped them. Wallace denies the claims, but the university expelled him — twice. Once for each case of “unwanted penetration,” records show.

Two years later, the 6-foot-3, 220-pound athlete played his first NCAA game at Prairie View A&M, a little-known Division I school near Houston with a football budget less than the salaries of some big-name Division I coaches.

His fall from the upper echelons of college football was as big and fast as him. But he remains in the game. And he’s still a much-discussed draft prospect for the NFL.

That’s because the national organization that regulates college athletes has no penalties for sexual, violent or criminal misconduct. Even when expelled from school for rape, the NCAA allows athletes to transfer elsewhere and keep playing.

An investigation by the USA TODAY Network identified at least 33 current and former athletes since 2014 who transferred to NCAA schools despite being administratively or criminally disciplined for a sexual offense at another college. The actual number is likely far higher, as most universities refuse to release records from disciplinary proceedings, even though federal law allows them to do so.

But Wallace’s case stands out because of the federal government’s role in helping hide the nature of his campus offenses.

The U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) under Secretary Betsy DeVos facilitated a confidential deal between Wallace’s mother and the University of Oregon, in which Oregon agreed to change the athlete’s transcript to remove reference to the sexual assaults.
In part because of the “apparent predatory nature” of the acts, the university had marked Wallace’s transcript with a rarely used notation that would alert other schools to his actions, records show. “Expelled for sexual misconduct,” his transcript said.

But with the federal agency’s help, Loleta Wallace brokered a deal in which Oregon amended her son’s transcript to say simply, “Expelled for student conduct,” records show, a change that would make other schools more likely to recruit him.

Oregon promised Loleta Wallace that the August 2018 resolution agreement would “not be discoverable or releasable” under the Freedom of Information Act, but the USA TODAY Network obtained a copy from a university source.

Said university spokesman Kyle Henley: “The matter was resolved between the university and the former student’s mother, and OCR dropped its investigation shortly after it opened it. At no time did OCR indicate to UO that OCR had concerns about the accuracy, adequacy, or fairness of our Title IX processes.”

The intervention by the OCR is part of a broader shift in the agency’s interpretation of Title IX, experts said. The 47-year-old law prohibiting sex discrimination in education historically has shielded women from environments where sexual assault and harassment are tolerated.

But as Wallace’s case illustrates, OCR now is applying the law to a broader range of claims, including those made by male students — or their mothers — claiming reverse sex discrimination in disciplinary proceedings.

Two factors in particular triggered the OCR’s investigation into Wallace’s case, an Education Department official confirmed. First, Oregon had a program offering free legal services to survivors but not to accused students. Second, Oregon didn’t allow Wallace to play or attend football games as part of his interim suspension during the investigation.

In a statement, Oregon attorney Kevin Reed noted that the student government pays for legal services for all students, and that its program for survivors, the Domestic Violence Clinic, is funded by a federal grant.

“We are very proud of the service the clinic provides and do not think there is any real risk that OCR was going to find UO in violation of civil rights laws due to its administration of a grant from the United States Department of Justice,” Reed said.

KC Johnson, a Brooklyn College professor who tracks litigation involving students accused of sexual misconduct, said Wallace’s case is the first he’s heard of in which the OCR took the position that unequal resources for the accused can constitute sex discrimination against men.

“It’s quite rare,” Johnson said, “and very significant.”

The Department of Education told the USA TODAY Network that it neither approved nor endorsed the deal and acted simply as a neutral facilitator after opening the investigation.

See Next Page
Prairie View A&M officials and coaches declined to comment. Wallace and his parents did not return numerous phone, email and social media messages.

The ordeal forever changed the life of Blake McKay, one of Wallace’s two victims. She never expected when she came to the school as a freshman that she’d wind up pursuing a career in sexual assault prevention and survivor advocacy.

Now an Oregon senior, she heads the Organization Against Sexual Assault student group on campus and worked as a trained legal advocate for child victims of physical and sexual abuse.

It has helped her heal, she said.

McKay hasn’t spoken publicly about the case until now. She hopes publishing her name will empower other rape survivors. And she took the NCAA to task for enabling such behavior.

That nothing prevented Wallace from continuing his college football career after the school found him responsible for two separate charges of rape shows that “the NCAA really provides support for athletes to do things like sexual violence,” she said.

With that support, Wallace has little incentive to change, she said.

“I don’t think that he should have the opportunity to be in that environment because it supports his behavior,” McKay said. “He’s still embedded in that culture of being celebrated, being entitled and being able to do whatever he wants.”

Four months, two victims

Wallace arrived on campus at the University of Oregon shortly after graduating from DeSoto High School in Texas. Fall quarter hadn’t yet started, but the freshman participated in football practices and team meetings while settling into college life.

During this time, Wallace met a couple of female students through the photo-sharing app Instagram, police reports show. He initiated a conversation with one by posting hearts on her photo. He reached out to the other through a direct message saying, “your so gorg (sic).”

Both women separately agreed to meet Wallace in person for the first time in September 2016. One of them was McKay. On her first date with Wallace, the athlete wanted sex but she told him no, that she was a virgin and that it was against her religion, according to her account in a police report. She found it respectful when Wallace ceased his attempts, she added.

On their next date, they were making out and undressing in Wallace’s bedroom when he started putting a condom on, a police report shows. She again told him no, that she wasn’t ready.

But Wallace told her she wouldn’t have come over if she didn’t want sex and that God wanted them to have sex, she told police. Wallace forced himself on her as she told him, “No, I don’t want to do it,” but he “pinned” his leg over hers so she couldn’t move, she told police.
Less than two weeks after McKay's assault, the second female student met Wallace for the first time at a party in his apartment where he repeatedly encouraged her to drink, a police report shows.

While at the party, Wallace pulled her into the bathroom. He started kissing her then flipped her around so she was facing the sink and forced his penis into her from behind, the report says. She told him "loudly" and a "few times" that she didn't want sex, she said. He responded, "But we already are," she told campus officials. She got away by twisting and pushing his chest, she said.

She recalled Wallace later pulling her into a bedroom at the party, trying again to have sex with her and not letting her leave. After finally getting out, the next thing she remembered was walking home with a group of friends and Wallace, the report shows. She and Wallace entered her apartment alone after her friends went a different direction, the report shows.

Wallace followed her to bed, she told police. She told him she was "too drunk" and "too tired" to have sex, but he forced himself on her, she said. She kept trying to get away, but Wallace didn't stop, she said. At some point she fell asleep or passed out, she said.

When she woke up the next morning, Wallace began kissing and feeling her body again, she said. She "blocked it out" as he raped her again, she told police.

Over the following days and weeks, she found herself "crying all the time," she told police. She underwent a rape-kit examination and was often scared, she said. Her sleep and studies suffered, and she stopped going out. Her friends told police she dropped classes and didn't want to sleep in her own bed, sometimes staying at friends' houses or a hotel instead.

McKay reported a similar reaction, telling police that before the night with Wallace she'd been an open, outgoing person who liked meeting people. After, she found it hard to open up and trust others. She was scared she might run into Wallace on campus, couldn't focus in class and found herself "anxious all the time." She ended up dropping a class.

'Predatory nature'

Both women separately reported their assaults to campus officials in October 2016, records show. University of Oregon administrators and campus police led concurrent investigations and spoke to more than two dozen witnesses.

Wallace declined to be interviewed at the advice of an attorney his parents hired, Education Department records show, but he sent an email to campus officials during the investigation.

"(I)n both of my current situations these so called 'VICTIMS' are indeed not telling the truth," Wallace wrote in the email. He added that the women reported him after they "realized that I did not want to pursue relationship (sic) with either one(.)"

In March 2017, a university Title IX investigator issued her findings. A preponderance of evidence established Wallace was responsible for both rapes, the investigator found. Oregon permanently expelled him and ordered the notation placed on his transcript.

See Next Page
Transcript notations often list the sanction, not the offense. But the investigator in this case said it was justified “due to the aggravating circumstances of the apparent predatory nature of the act itself,” “the use of physical force,” and the fact that Wallace had been found responsible for the violation twice, records show.

In May 2017, the Lane County District Attorney’s office declined to prosecute either case against Wallace. The burden of proof is higher for criminal cases than university cases.

“The issue is consent,” deputy district attorney Katherine Green wrote in both case evaluation memos. “Based on the evidence both from the criminal investigation and the student conduct investigation and proceeding, the state cannot prove this case beyond a reasonable doubt.”

Wallace withdrew from Oregon before either the student conduct or criminal investigations concluded.

He enrolled in January 2017 at Trinity Valley Community College in Athens, Texas, about 80 miles from his hometown of DeSoto, Trinity Valley officials confirmed. He joined the football team that same year and caught eight touchdowns in 12 games, earning first-team all-conference honors for the season.

Wallace graduated at the end of the year with an associate degree, school officials said. That meant under NCAA rules he could transfer to any school.

But at the time, his transcript notation still declared he’d been, “Expelled for Sexual Misconduct.”

A university that knowingly brings to campus a student who’s committed a sexual assault elsewhere can be held liable if that student hurts someone else and the school did nothing to protect other students, according to multiple civil rights and Title IX attorneys.

It’s hard to deny knowledge when it’s written on the student’s transcript.

**Reverse sex discrimination**

Wallace’s mother was already on top of it.

Two months after her son’s expulsion from Oregon but before he took the field at Trinity Valley, Loleta Wallace filed the OCR complaint that triggered the federal investigation.

She alleged that the university discriminated against her son on the basis of his sex by “automatically assuming that a male is guilty of sexual misconduct because a female simply says so and doesn’t PROVE that such has occurred,” a copy of the May 2017 complaint shows.

She additionally believed that text messages exchanged between her son and each woman after the assault demonstrated his innocence, according to a transcript of her phone call with OCR officials.

Loleta Wallace also said Oregon discriminated against her son based on his race.
The OCR dismissed the race claim, saying it was too speculative, records show. But it agreed to investigate “whether the university discriminated against (Wallace) on the basis of sex when it failed to respond appropriately to incidents of sexual violence involving the student and two female students,” according to an April 2018 letter to university President Michael Schill.

Over the past several years, the Education Department has investigated hundreds of schools for mishandling victims’ reports of sexual assault. More recently, however, its priorities have shifted.

Under Barack Obama, the department made a policy choice to require universities to investigate reports of sexual violence as gender discrimination under Title IX. The policy came in response to what the administration saw as a growing campus sexual assault crisis. Several studies found at least 1 in 5 female students reported being sexually assaulted in college.

But with Devos as education secretary under Donald Trump, the department rescinded the policy and proposed new regulations that would result in fewer university Title IX investigations and fewer students held responsible.

For the first time, the regulations would explicitly say accused students can be considered victims of sex discrimination if the university treats them unfairly in the disciplinary process.

After receiving Loleta Wallace’s complaint, the OCR gave her and the university the opportunity to settle the matter on their own terms rather than fully investigating and issuing a ruling.

Removing the transcript notation was her top priority, records show. Asked by an OCR case worker if it was affecting her son’s ability to transfer, she responded in the affirmative, according to a non-verbatim transcript of that June 2017 phone call.

“We proactively transferred him before he got the notation,” Loleta Wallace said of her son’s switch to Trinity Valley. “But now because of the decision ... they’ve indicated that they’ll mark his transcript. He will graduate with his associates degree. He will want to go back to a Division I school, but the coaches, the first thing they will ask will be the result of the investigation. They are all waiting and that will affect his recruitment.”

In an August 2018 resolution agreement facilitated by the OCR, Loleta Wallace dropped her complaint and Oregon promised to carefully review allegations of investigator bias and provide an advocate and support services for accused students in the future.

Importantly, Oregon also agreed to reword Wallace’s transcript notation.

“UO did change the notation on the transcript,” university spokesman Henley said, “to make it consistent with how transcripts are noted in all expulsion cases.”

“The university is constantly examining its Title IX processes with an eye toward improving our response to issues of campus safety as well as fairness,” Henley added. “The proposal to add a confidential respondents’ resources coordinator position was under discussion for many months before the resolution of the complaint with the former student’s mother.”
Said Johnson, the Brooklyn College professor, “It’s a statement from the OCR that a school can violate Title IX by unfairly treating an accused student.”

But that interpretation of the law is “problematic,” “dangerous” and part of a growing trend under Trump, said Sarah Nesbitt, policy and advocacy organizer for the nonprofit Know Your IX.

While unequal resources may be a legitimate concern, Nesbitt said, accused students can be of any sex or gender, and so can victims. So the imbalance is not unique to one gender or sex, she said. But accused students are overwhelmingly male, so the Education Department is making a leap that unbalanced processes amounts to per se sex discrimination against men, she said.

“That’s not how sex discrimination works,” Nesbitt said. “Reclaiming the narrative of sex discrimination erases the very gendered nature of sexual violence.”

**Back in action**

McKay had hoped the transcript notation would protect other women by preventing, or at least limiting, Wallace’s recruitment to a new school, she said.

Oregon kept her in the dark as it negotiated the resolution agreement with Loleta Wallace, she said. After initially notifying her about the complaint, university officials did not update her again until after the school agreed to amend his transcript, she said. Looking back, she said, she would have appreciated a chance to be included or at least informed during that process.

She recalled being heartbroken upon learning the school had sanitized Wallace’s transcript notation.

“I felt like I just went through the reporting process for nothing,” she said. “I went through all this pain of trying to just get to the end of the case. Then they told me that they were removing it from his transcript, and I just felt almost useless.

“I get that the processes have to be fair for everyone involved, but it’s also not fair when you sexually assault someone.”

And yet, Prairie View A&M signed Wallace to its football team months before the settlement was reached.

Wallace’s transcript still noted his sexual misconduct when Oregon sent it to Prairie View in January 2018, Henley said — one month before first-year Prairie View head coach Eric Dooley signed him.

Dooley and other Prairie View officials have been silent about Wallace’s presence at the school and on the football team. Interim athletic director Alicia Pete and spokeswoman LaTonia Thirston ignored the USA TODAY Network’s emails for a month.
Finally, when presented with the detailed allegations against Wallace, Thirston responded, “In accordance with federal and state privacy laws, Prairie View A&M University cannot comment on a student’s disciplinary history, if any, or admissions process.”

More than three years after the assaults, Oregon continues to deny public records requests for copies of both victims’ police reports, even redacted versions. But when Loleta Wallace filed a complaint with the OCR, the reports became part of a different public case file.

Bill Harbaugh, an economics professor and president of the Oregon faculty senate at the time, obtained a copy of the Education Department’s 615-page case file through a FOIA request and shared it with this reporter.

The department denied the USA TODAY Network’s subsequent request for the same file, after Oregon attorneys complained it released private information to Harbaugh.

Said Harbaugh, “I believe that public knowledge about sexual violence, and how universities respond or do not respond to it, helps encourage survivors to come forward and report and helps universities develop better policies and procedures.”

Wallace continues to play for Prairie View, which has a 6-5 record this season. He leads the team with 40 catches. In his two years there, he has racked up more than 1,100 receiving yards. He was also a reserve player last season on the Prairie View basketball team, which made an appearance in the March Madness tournament earlier this year.

A banner on campus featuring him in his Panthers uniform reads, “Where champions are built.”

He has one more year of NCAA football eligibility remaining. Assuming he graduates in the spring and stays out of trouble — campus police say they have not received any assault reports involving him — he could use the graduate-transfer exception to play for another school.

Or he could aim for his dream job, listed on his Prairie View bio: NFL.
NCAA looks other way as athletes punished for sex offenses play on

By: Kenny Jacoby

Two women separately accused University of South Florida football player LaDarrius Jackson of sexual assault in 2017, saying the 6-foot-4, 250-pound defensive end forced himself on them in their own homes.

Police arrested Jackson twice in two weeks on charges of sexual battery and false imprisonment. He pleaded not guilty and posted bond while awaiting trial. Both criminal cases are ongoing.

The university also opened a student conduct case against the then-22-year-old junior. It determined that he had violated its policy against "non-consensual sexual intercourse" and expelled him.

Yet one year later, Jackson played before a crowd of nearly 30,000 fans as Tennessee State University took on Vanderbilt in Nashville. Jackson played six games for TSU in 2018, transferring there while facing the possibility of decades behind bars in Florida.

That his expulsion and ongoing criminal case posed no obstacle to his collegiate football career isn't unusual.

College athletes can lose their NCAA eligibility in numerous ways, but sexual assault is not one of them. Even when facing or having been convicted of criminal charges, even when suspended or expelled from school, NCAA rules allow them to transfer elsewhere and keep playing.

An investigation by the USA TODAY Network identified at least 28 current and former athletes since 2014 who transferred to NCAA schools despite being administratively disciplined for a sexual offense at another college. It found an additional five who continued playing after being convicted or disciplined for such offenses in the courts.

In addition to Jackson, who through his attorney declined to comment, these players include a wide receiver from the University of Oregon, a kicker from the University of Kentucky, a defensive end from Purdue and an All-American sprinter now at Texas Tech who helped the track team win its first-ever national championship in June.

Former Buckeye wide receiver Eric Glover-Williams transferred to Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania in 2018 after being suspended from Ohio State University for a rape allegation in 2016. Defensive lineman Se'Von Pittman transferred to the University of Akron in 2013 after being found responsible for rape at Ohio State the same year, Ohio State officials confirmed. Neither player was charged criminally.
The Dispatch reported in September 2017 that then-coach Urban Meyer said Glover-Williams was no longer on the team because of a “school conduct issue.” The newspaper reported in March 2013 that Pittman had been granted his release. Sources told The Dispatch then that the release had to do with an off-the-field issue and that Pittman was looking for a fresh start.

Additionally, Calvin Lortie joined the cross country team at Capital University in Columbus in 2016 after being dismissed from Ohio State for allegations of rape and non-consensual sexual contact the same year. He also was not charged criminally.

The NCAA notoriously metes out punishments to student athletes for bad grades, smoking marijuana or accepting money and free meals. But nowhere in its 440-page Division I rulebook does it cite penalties for sexual, violent or criminal misconduct. And unlike the pro leagues, the NCAA has no personal conduct policy and no specific penalties for those who commit sexual assault.

The NCAA’s highest governance body, a group of university presidents, chancellors and athletic directors known as the Board of Governors, is well aware of the issue. But it has resisted calls from eight U.S. senators and its own study commission to fix it.

The NCAA declined to comment for this story.

The list of 33 players identified by the news organization — which operates 261 daily newspapers — is by no means an exhaustive count.

The USA TODAY Network filed public records requests for campus disciplinary records at 226 public universities in the NCAA’s highest echelon, Division I, but 5 of every 6 universities refused to provide the records, even though federal law gives them explicit permission to do so. The investigation also involved combing through hundreds of pages of police reports, court filings and other documents, and speaking with dozens of school officials, victims, lawyers, researchers and advocates.

Among the investigation’s other findings:

- No matter if schools suspend, dismiss or expel athletes for sexual misconduct, NCAA rules provide avenues for them to return to the field on a new team within a year, and sometimes immediately.

- Approached by the USA TODAY Network about athletes on their rosters previously disciplined for sexual misconduct, many athletic departments said they had no knowledge of the past offenses. Most schools lack formal background-check policies, instead relying on former coaches’ words and a questionnaire called a “transfer tracer” that often fails to capture past disciplinary problems.

- Players regularly exploit the NCAA’s own loopholes to circumvent its one meaningful penalty for those who transfer while suspended or expelled — a year of bench time. Athletes can go to a junior college for a minimum of one semester before returning to a Division I school. Or they can transfer to another NCAA school before the discipline takes effect.
A handful of the NCAA’s nearly three dozen Division I conferences have adopted their own policies banning athletes with past behavioral problems. But their definitions of culpability vary, and some problematic athletes have slipped through the cracks.

The records provided by 35 public Division I universities show they disciplined NCAA athletes for sexual misconduct at three times the rate of the general student population since 2014, and football players were disciplined the most. No news organization, university or athletic institution, including the NCAA, has ever done such a comprehensive study of athletes found responsible in campus conduct investigations.

Recent research has shown that a small fraction of students commit a majority of campus sexual assaults. That makes the practice of bringing athletes previously disciplined for sexual assault onto new campuses “an extreme liability,” said John Foubert, a rape prevention expert for the U.S. Army and dean of the Union University education college in Tennessee.

“I think it’s a fundamentally stupid idea,” Foubert said.

Campus disciplinary proceedings often are criticized as unfair toward the accused. Some students have complained that schools violated their due process rights and won favorable rulings in court. U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos is working to allow schools to increase the recommended evidentiary threshold in those cases.

Some also argue that athletes disciplined by their schools are innocent until proven guilty in court and should not be disqualified from competing. However, athletes convicted of sex crimes and registered as sex offenders — including former Air Force football players Jamil Cooks and Anthony Daniels — also are among those who have received second chances.

Others criticize colleges for creating the sense of entitlement that can translate into sexually violent behavior. Athletes routinely receive exclusive access to multi-million-dollar facilities, free food, clothing, tutoring, training, medical treatment and equipment, priority registration in classes, full-ride scholarships and even monetary stipends.

If colleges and coaches do not instill in players a sense of responsibility that comes with these privileges, it can set them up to fail, said Laura Finley, a professor of sociology and criminology at Barry University in Florida.

“They are often your most idolized people on campus,” Finley said. “They may be getting preferential treatment by university officials or other people already. They are oftentimes used to doing what they want and being the big man on campus.”

The USA TODAY Network reached out to nearly 100 coaches, athletics directors and athletes for comment for this story. All but two coaches and one athletic director declined interviews. Others provided statements instead, or referred questions to university spokespeople and attorneys. Those sources said their schools scrutinized the players thoroughly, believed they were safe for campus and so far haven’t received subsequent sexual misconduct reports involving them.
But that approach might expose universities to what California civil rights attorney John Manly called a “ticking time bomb.” They could be liable for legal damages if the transfers hurt someone there, and in most states, so could administrators and coaches, Manly said.

“If that time bomb goes off while that person’s at school, that university has full liability,” said Manly, who represented the victims of Larry Nassar, the former USA Gymnastics and Michigan State University doctor sentenced to prison for sexually abusing young athletes in his care.

For survivors of campus rape, the issue is not one of legal liability or policy consistency. It’s about the moral and ethical implications of re-elevating the perpetrators of their traumatic assaults to positions of prominence while leaving the aggrieved to pick up the pieces.

“It blows my mind how transactional it is, and how they don’t think about the consequences for the student body or for the school,” said Daisy Tackett, a former University of Kansas rower who in 2015 reported being raped by a KU football player.

In that case, KU found long snapper Jordan Goldenberg responsible for engaging in “non-consensual sex” with Tackett and sexually harassing another rower in a separate incident, documents show. He was banned from campus, only to resurface on the Indiana State University football team a few months later.

Goldenberg did not respond to multiple phone and social media messages seeking comment.

Indiana State told the USA TODAY Network that only assistant coach Gary Hyman “was aware of Jordan Goldenberg’s student conduct background” at the time. Hyman previously had coached Goldenberg at KU. After the news of his transfer broke, Indiana State dismissed Goldenberg from the team and suspended Hyman for two days with pay.

Hyman knew Goldenberg had gotten in trouble at KU but didn’t know why or that he had been expelled, he said.

“I deeply regret that I was not more communicative with the limited information I had about Goldenberg,” said Hyman, who is now the University of Texas at San Antonio football team’s special teams coordinator. “At no time, though, was there any deception or ill intent on my part.”

“There are probably millions of other people that they could recruit,” Tackett said. “I don’t get why it’s so hard for the NCAA to say, ‘Rape is bad.’”
Athletes overrepresented in sex cases

Concealed public records hide extent of problem

By: Kenny Jacoby, USA Today Network

Over the past five years, universities disciplined NCAA athletes for sexual misconduct at more than three times the rate of the general student population. Football players were disciplined the most.

Almost three dozen NCAA Division I universities contributed data, including Ohio State University, the University of Florida and Michigan State University. Fewer than 3% of their students were athletes, but athletes made up nearly 9% of the students found responsible for sexual offenses.

And while representing less than 1% of the overall student population at the schools with football teams, gridiron standouts accounted for more than 6% of those found responsible for sexual misconduct.

But these results from a USA TODAY Network investigation may be understated because many rapes and sexual assaults on campus go unreported and because many universities refuse to inform the public about one of the biggest problems they face today.

Like the Catholic Church, the Boy Scouts of America and USA Gymnastics, universities have concealed evidence that would help reveal the extent of their sexual abuse problems — even though Congress rewrote federal law two decades ago to ensure the public has access to campus disciplinary records.

"Information related to crimes of violence should not be protected from disclosure if we truly want our college campuses to be safe environments for all students," said then-U.S. Rep. Bill Goodling, R-Pennsylvania, during floor debate on the law. "If students do not know about violent offenders in their college community, how will they know how to protect themselves?"

Over the past year, the USA TODAY Network tried to collect these disciplinary records from 226 Division I public schools across the country. But only 35 complied. The rest either claimed state laws protect the names of students who commit rape and sexual assault, demanded exorbitant sums to provide the information, said they weren’t required to release the records or still haven’t processed the requests.

That’s 191 schools — 85% of the total — that shielded the identities of alleged abusers at the expense of women’s safety and the public’s right to know.

The low response rate from universities “is a sad commentary on the culture of secrecy and image obsession that permeates higher education,” said Frank LoMonte, a University of Florida professor and expert in federal student privacy laws.

See next page
“People in higher education have come to regard their institutions as a brand and will do anything to protect the brand,” LoMonte said, “even if that means putting people on campus at risk.”

Federal regulations and guidance around the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) are clear: "An institution may disclose to anyone — not just the victim — the final results of a disciplinary proceeding, if it determines that the student is an alleged perpetrator of a crime of violence or non-forcible sex offense, and with respect to the allegation made against him or her, the student has committed a violation of the institution’s rules or policies.

“The disclosure of final results must include only the name of the student, the violation committed, and any sanction imposed by the institution against the student.”

The USA TODAY Network sought just that — the final results of disciplinary proceedings in which the accused student was found responsible for a sexual or violent offense.

From the 35 universities that complied with the requests — except the University of Washington, which is still in the process of providing records after nearly eight months — the USA TODAY Network identified 531 students disciplined for sex offenses since January 2014. One of every 12 names on that list belonged to an NCAA athlete, even though their ratio of enrolled students at those same schools during that time was three times fewer — only one in 36.

Forty-seven athletes appeared on the list. Nearly two-thirds — 30 — played football. Their representation among disciplined students was more than eight times higher than non-football players.

“What this tells us is that hard data show athletes to be more dangerous to women than nonathletes, and football players in particular are more likely to commit sexual violence against other college students,” said John Foubert, a rape prevention expert for the U.S. Army and education college dean at Union University in Tennessee.

Until now, no university, news outlet or sports organization, including the NCAA, had ever conducted a study across so many institutions that examined the rate at which schools punished NCAA athletes for sex offenses.

“It's completely consistent with what I would have expected,” said Brett Sokolow, president of the Association of Title IX Administrators, whose members include sexual misconduct investigators at colleges across the U.S.

Title IX is the federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in education.

“Athletes have always been disproportionately involved in these cases,” Sokolow said.

Two statisticians the USA TODAY Network consulted about its study methods, William Huber and William Fairley of Analysis & Inference Inc., cautioned that the 35 compliant universities could be subject to selection bias. For example, it is possible they elected to provide records because they believed the public should know about problems with athletes on their campuses.
Or, the statisticians said, perhaps they provided records because they believed they had nothing to hide — whereas schools that didn’t provide records could be covering up even bigger problems within their athletic departments.

The findings underscore an immediate need for the NCAA to undertake athlete-specific interventions and punish those found responsible, said several experts who study sexual violence prevention.

Unlike pro leagues, the NCAA has no specific penalties for athletes found to have committed sexual violence either by their schools or in courts of law. And nothing stops expelled and suspended athletes from transferring and playing elsewhere.

“We need to find ways to hold people accountable for their behavior, and continuing to allow somebody to play a sport uninterrupted is rewarding that behavior,” said Kristy McCray, an Otterbein University professor who studies sexual violence prevention in sports.

“There is a fine line between what punishment works best, but I think we would all agree that no punishment is not a good idea.”

The fight for records

In 1998, Congress amended FERPA to codify that the public should have access to information about violent and sexual offenses committed by students.

The amendment, introduced by then-U.S. Rep. Mark Foley, R-Florida, declared that “nothing in [FERPA] shall be construed to prohibit” schools from disclosing the final results of such disciplinary proceedings if the student was found to have violated school rules with respect to the offense.

“When a university finds through its own disciplinary proceedings that a student has committed an act of violence, such as sexual assault, the university community has a right to know about it,” Foley said during the floor debate.

But 21 years later, there are only two U.S. states — New Mexico and Wyoming — where every Division I public university complied with the USA TODAY Network’s requests for that exact information.

The universities that complied span 14 states. Most schools in Ohio, Washington and Georgia complied, but a few schools — including Washington State University and the University of Georgia — refused or set up major cost barriers.

In a few cases, state laws specifically prevented the disclosure of the information. In North Dakota, for example, Title IX records are designated as exempt from public records laws.

Many schools claimed releasing the information would constitute an unwarranted invasion of the privacy rights of those involved, even though federal lawmakers said the opposite. Three schools in the State University of New York (SUNY) system, for example, said releasing the names
“could endanger the life or safety of the accused, as well as the reporting individual and witnesses.”

Indiana University said the law did not require it to “make determinations” as to which of its student conduct offenses would be considered violent or sexual.

And some schools issued astronomical fee estimates to provide the same records that other schools gave for free. The University of Maryland said preparing the records would take nearly 600 hours of staff time and cost more than $22,000 to provide. The University of Oregon said it would charge more than $12,000 and redact the records almost entirely anyway.

But by far the most common excuse from schools was that, rather than require them to provide the information, FERPA simply permitted them to release it if they so choose. Most chose not to.

The University of Texas at Austin is one such school. But that interpretation of FERPA is at odds with state open records laws, which say public agencies must disclose records unless another law specifically prohibits their disclosure.

The USA TODAY Network filed a lawsuit against the university through one of its Texas publications, The Austin American-Statesman. The suit is pending.

The lawsuit closely resembles one filed against the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill by the student newspaper, The Daily Tar Heel, and other news outlets in 2016.

In that case, Tar Heel reporters requested records to determine how the university’s new sexual misconduct policy was working and who it was working for, said Jane Wester, the editor-in-chief at the time. The university implemented the new policy after the U.S. Department of Education opened a sex discrimination investigation into the school for mishandling sexual assault complaints.

But UNC said provision of the records was discretionary and it chose not to release them, prompting the newspaper to sue. The superior court sided with UNC, but the appeals court sided with the newspaper. The case is now before the North Carolina Supreme Court, where it awaits a ruling.

“It’s an issue of physical safety,” Wester said. “If UNC can release it, and they’re not, it seems like they have a reason why: to protect their own reputation.”

Arguing the case before the Supreme Court, Hugh Stevens, the Tar Heel’s lawyer, said: “What’s the privacy interest in keeping secret the names of people who have committed heinous sexual offenses on campus? Why is the university protecting sexual predators at all?”

LoMonte, the FERPA expert, filed an amicus brief in the case.

Said LoMonte: “Schools are so obsessed with promoting a favorable public image that they’re willing to defy the law.”

Risk of reoffending
Of the 47 athletes identified in the university records as having been found responsible for sexual offenses, at least 11 transferred and continued their playing careers at other NCAA schools.

In addition to the 11 identified from the records, the USA TODAY Network confirmed 22 more athletes who transferred despite being administratively or criminally disciplined for sex offenses by first searching court and police records and media reports, and then confirming through public records and university officials — for a total of at least 33. This is by no means an exhaustive count.

If the 34 public universities, not counting the University of Washington, that complied with the records requests are representative of all 351 Division I schools — some of which are private and not subject to public records laws — then one could expect roughly 485 Division I athletes found responsible for sexual misconduct in the past five and a half years, and 113 of them to have transferred elsewhere in the NCAA.

The true numbers may be even higher, several experts said, because schools harboring the biggest athlete sexual assault problems may be unlikely to disclose the records voluntarily.

These numbers were especially troubling to Foubert, whose research team’s groundbreaking study earlier this year offered the most comprehensive evidence yet that campus rape is primarily an issue of serial perpetrators as opposed to one-time offenders.

Analyzing an anonymous survey of more than 12,000 college men across 49 institutions, his research team found that repeat offenders accounted for 87% of alcohol-involved rapes on college campuses, and they averaged at least five each. College campuses are the most common venue for alcohol-involved rape, Foubert said.

"With an average of at least five infractions per perpetrator, chances are if a perpetrator is caught, he has committed sexual assault before and will likely do it again,” the study found.

The study also found that students who reported participating in campus sports constituted an outsized share of repeat offenders.

The finding is consistent with several previous studies that have found college athletes overrepresented in campus sexual assaults, regardless of whether the assaults were reported.

Schools that recruit previously disciplined athletes but take no action to protect other students will likely be held liable if the students go on to hurt others, said John Clune, an attorney who has represented victims in dozens of campus sexual assault cases across the U.S.

The standard is known as “deliberate indifference,” and it was the basis of a 2015 federal lawsuit Clune filed on behalf of a female University of Oregon student who a year earlier reported being gang-raped by three basketball players.

One of them, Brandon Austin, had been found responsible for sexual assault at his previous school, Providence College, before transferring to Oregon, according to the lawsuit.
Oregon officials, including coach Dana Altman, knew about the Providence case but did nothing to protect students at Oregon, the lawsuit said.

The university settled with the student for $800,000 and attendance costs. The players, who denied the allegations, also sued the university, but judges dismissed their lawsuits, court records show.

All three players continued their college basketball careers at other schools.

Similar cases have played out in courts around the country for years.

Schools that decide to enroll students who've been dismissed elsewhere for sexual offenses should take proactive measures to ensure student safety, Clune said. That may include placing restrictions on the students’ campus access, requiring supervision or counseling and alerting other students, he said. But Clune said he is unaware of any universities actually taking those steps.

“Nobody does it,” he said. “They just let them in and hope that a sex offender won’t do it again, which is one of the more ignorant things that you can presume.”

It’s hard to gauge the frequency of such repeat-offender cases because the vast majority of sexual assaults go unreported, Clune said.

The Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN) estimates that roughly 23% of female undergraduates experience rape or sexual assault through physical force, violence or incapacitation. But only one in five college-aged female students report their assaults to law enforcement, according to RAINN. Of those who did not report to police, 4% or fewer reported to campus officials.

“For the majority of transfers, the school never hears anything,” Clune said. “That doesn’t mean that person hasn’t continued their behavior. The odds are in schools’ favor that they can let the kid in and never have to deal with it.”
Advocates push NCAA schools to ban violent athletes

By: Kenny Jacoby

Eighteen years after Brenda Tracy said she was gang-raped by college football players, the NCAA’s highest governing body offered her a seat at the table.

The organization’s Board of Governors appointed Tracy in 2016 to its study group, the Commission to Combat Campus Sexual Violence, after she hand-delivered a petition with more than 150,000 signatures urging that athletes who commit sexual violence be banned from playing.

The commission met for two years before recommending in June 2018 that college athletes’ participation on the field be directly linked to their behavior off it — a step several of the NCAA’s largest conferences and schools already had taken.

But at their August 2018 meeting, the university presidents, chancellors and athletic directors who constitute the Board of Governors disbanded the commission without taking up the recommendation, noting in meeting minutes that they would “continue to monitor and track” the issue of sexual violence.

“At first I was angry,” Tracy said. “Then I was really sad. Actually thinking about it makes me want to cry right now.”

Her work didn’t stop after the commission.

Since going public with her story in 2014, Tracy has become one of the most visible advocates for raising awareness of sexual assaults on campus, especially those involving athletes. She has retold her story at more than 80 universities and high schools, and at every stop she hears a new victim’s account.

“These are literally life-and-death issues,” Tracy said. “The NCAA has an opportunity to fix it, and they are deliberately choosing not to. It’s not that they can’t. They just won’t. At this point I look at them as being complicit.”

A USA TODAY Network investigation identified at least 33 athletes since 2014 who transferred to NCAA schools despite being administratively or criminally disciplined for sexual offenses at another college. The actual number is probably far higher because most schools refused to share discipline records, even though federal law expressly allows them to do so.

With help from lawyers and other advocates, Tracy and fellow commission member Cody McDavis kept working to fix the problem, designing what they dubbed the “Tracy Rule.” Student leaders and U.S. lawmakers are among those who see it as a potential solution to an
NCAA system that allows coaches to freely recruit sexual offenders or leaves them in the dark about athletes’ past.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, said the Tracy Rule should be implemented across all college sports.

“If you’re going to address a real challenge and put forth a meaningful set of solutions, you’re going to do it by having a strong, uniform set of practices,” Wyden said. “You need a broader policy that is based on zero tolerance.

“What I want to hear the NCAA say is they’ve got a zero tolerance for sexual assault, and that’s not really their argument.”

The University of Texas at San Antonio became the first NCAA school to adopt the Tracy Rule in September.

But Tracy isn’t done.

“We don’t have to wait for the NCAA,” Tracy said. “This is an issue that needs to be addressed now.”

Conferences take action

Before the Tracy Rule, six of the NCAA’s 33 Division I conferences and a handful of individual schools adopted similar, but less stringent, policies against athletes who commit serious misconduct.

The movement for tougher rules began with a high-profile case of recidivism.

The University of Georgia dismissed defensive lineman Jonathan Taylor in July 2014 after his arrest for allegedly choking his girlfriend during a dorm-room altercation. Taylor played the next season at a junior college.

Then he landed at the University of Alabama, where head coach Nick Saban called Taylor “the kind of guy that deserved a second chance” while discussing his recruitment in February 2015. But less than three months into his time with the Crimson Tide, Taylor was arrested in a criminal mischief and domestic violence case with a new girlfriend and was dismissed from the team by Saban.

The girlfriend later recanted her domestic violence claim, but Alabama kicked Taylor out of school anyway, and he ultimately pleaded guilty to criminal mischief in July 2015. Later that summer, he transferred again — this time to Southeastern Louisiana University, where he played one season before pleading guilty to assault and battery in the 2014 Georgia case.

The Southeastern Conference responded by adopting a first-of-its-kind serious misconduct policy in May 2015. The rule banned athletes from transferring to SEC schools to play sports if their previous schools found them responsible for sexual assault or domestic violence. The Big 12,
Pac-12, Southern Conference and Mid-American Conference followed with similar restrictions soon after.

Then the Big Sky Conference unveiled a sweeping new policy in June 2018, building off the SEC rule. It requires both current and prospective athletes to annually self-report any campus, police, civil or juvenile investigations involving serious misconduct. It also expanded the list of disqualifying offenses to include sexual exploitation and assaults involving deadly weapons or serious injury.

Under the Big Sky rule, coaches can seek waivers for athletes with extenuating circumstances, triggering a review from a panel that includes the university’s coordinator for Title IX, the federal equal opportunity law prohibiting sex discrimination in education.

Big Sky Commissioner Andrea Williams, who served alongside Tracy on the NCAA’s study commission, showcased the rule at the commission’s final meeting.

But the Board of Governors punted on the commission’s recommendation to direct the NCAA divisions to consider such legislation. Asked about the decision at a news conference this past March, NCAA President Mark Emmert, a non-voting board member, assigned blame to the commission.

“Because we operate in all 50 states, all the legal structures are highly different, and all of the classifications of misdemeanor and felony around sexual assault and sexual misconduct are highly variable,” Emmert said. “The commission that the board put together … found it impossible to sort through all of those differences to treat everyone fairly.”

Emmert’s assertion is “just not true,” said McDavis, the commission member and UCLA law graduate who worked alongside Tracy. He noted that the Big Sky Conference — representing schools from 10 states that recruit from all 50 — already accounted for differences among legal jurisdictions.

“The only thing we got from the board was, ‘We’re not going to explore this because of laws in different states,’” McDavis said. “For something as large and as resourceful as the NCAA to be unable to put their heads together and find a solution, that just doesn’t feel genuine.”

That’s when Tracy and McDavis, indignant over the board’s decision, began building their own policy using Big Sky as an example. It was McDavis who encouraged Tracy to name the rule after herself.

A personal connection

The Tracy Rule is the most comprehensive serious misconduct policy to date.

Like the Big Sky policy, it requires athletes to self-report pending and closed investigations in an annual questionnaire. It expands the list of disqualifying offenses to include sexual harassment, incest, hate crimes, manslaughter and murder.
Crucially, it also requires the Title IX coordinator from each transfer-athlete’s previous school to state whether that athlete was involved in any Title IX investigations at that school. Such investigations look into reports of sexual misconduct, interpersonal violence and gender-based discrimination.

It removes coaches’ and schools’ ability to say they didn’t know about previous incidents, Tracy said.

Athletes disqualified by the Tracy Rule can appeal to a university review panel, which can request advisory opinions from a committee comprised of at least one victim’s advocate, counselor or other employee who is trauma-informed. The president and athletic director make the final decision based on the panel’s assessment.

Tracy began shopping the rule to university leaders when she visited their schools for speaking engagements. For months, she said, all she heard was, “We’ll get back to you.” Then she had a lunch meeting with University of Texas at San Antonio President Taylor Eighmy that brought her to tears.

“It just fell on me,” Tracy said, recounting the dozens of universities that brushed off her proposals. “I’d worked so hard, and then this man just said, ‘Yes.’ It was a really impactful moment for me.”

That moment was two decades in the making — one that began on a June night in 1998 when what was supposed to have been a fun time with a friend turned into a seven-hour nightmare.

Tracy had been gang-raped, sodomized and robbed by four men, she told the police in Corvallis, Oregon, while making a report shortly after the incident. Two of her attackers were football players for Oregon State University, one was an OSU recruit from Southern California, and the other played football for a community college, she said.

She described having alcohol poured down her throat while the men cheered one another on and took turns assaulting her. She was examined the following day by a nurse and a physician, who told investigators they found evidence of rape, she said.

All four men were booked in the county jail. The suspects implicated one another in the accounts they gave police, and prosecutors had physical evidence and the testimony of the medical professionals to make their case, reports show.

But the district attorney’s office dissuaded Tracy from moving forward, she later said. Prosecutors told her they would probably lose at trial and never mentioned her assailants’ contradictory statements, Tracy recalled. Amid attacks from the community on her and her credibility, she made what she thought at the time was an informed decision to drop out of the case, she said.

Prosecutors dropped the charges. The Oregon State players served one-game suspensions for what their coach, Mike Riley, called “a bad choice” — a statement, he told The Oregonian, he later regretted.
Tracy was a 24-year-old waitress and single mom to two boys at the time. She’d been sexually abused as a child and endured a series of abusive relationships with men, she said.

She said she contemplated killing herself. It was a conversation with the nurse who treated her that saved her, she said. Tracy went on to get her nursing degree.

And while it would take her 16 years to go public with her story, the disclosure felt liberating, she said. She continued to tell the story while starting a nonprofit called Set The Expectation and lobbying for changes in NCAA policies.

The response from college athletes has been “overwhelmingly positive,” she said. Schools and organizations around the country honor her for her advocacy work.

But aside from the spot on the commission, the NCAA itself has never acknowledged her campaign, she said.

“Dozens and dozens of coaches, staff members and athletes are representing the campaign at NCAA schools,” Tracy said. “It kind of makes me wonder why the NCAA is silent.”

**Does it work?**

Every current University of Texas at San Antonio athlete filled out the serious-misconduct questionnaire when the university officially adopted the Tracy Rule in the fall.

So far, none of its roughly 350 athletes have answered yes to any of the questions, no one has been disqualified, and no one has gone through the appeals process, UTSA spokesman Joe Izbrand confirmed.

The Big Sky conference has had similar results. When it implemented the rule this August, nearly 5,000 athletes filled out the questionnaire. None have answered affirmatively, been disqualified or appealed, Senior Associate Commissioner Jaynee Nadolski said.

UTSA Athletic Director Lisa Campos said she was not concerned about athletes answering dishonestly. Her coaches already do a thorough job vetting recruits’ character, she said, and she expects the questionnaire to act as a deterrent.

“It sends a message to students,” Campos said. “And it makes them probably think twice about going to the UTSA if they’re having to disclose this sort of information.”

Big Sky’s Nadolski said it’s possible some athletes transferred elsewhere instead of risking disqualification.

“My hope is that people are honest,” Nadolski said, adding that Big Sky might consider requiring Title IX records checks, like the Tracy Rule does, in the future.

Some experts who reviewed the Tracy Rule feared Title IX coordinators would refuse to fill out the paperwork to avoid getting dragged into a potential lawsuit. There are no legal barriers to
providing the information, said Brett Sokolow, president of the Association of Title IX Administrators — it’s a matter of “risk aversion.”

“The school should be able to defend itself,” Sokolow said. “That doesn’t mean it’s not going to get sued. It’s about building a consciousness that perhaps they’re more legally vulnerable for not sharing than for sharing.”

UTSA has not run into any such issues, officials said. To date, the university has received paperwork for two prospective transfers, and the Title IX coordinators at each of their previous institutions signed off, said university attorney Jay Rossello.

The hard costs of implementing the Tracy Rule have been minimal, Rossello said, but he noted that officials from the legal affairs, student conduct and equal opportunity offices spent several months working on the rule.

Schools considering adopting it should make sure it aligns with existing policies and develop a communication plan so that coaches and athletes understand and can articulate why it’s important, Rossello said.

Nadolski had similar advice. She added that it was important to involve athletes in the process and ensure 100% buy-in from coaches.

“There’s got to be education for your coaches as they’re going out recruiting that this is the expectation now,” Nadolski said.

Campos said the school has received an outpouring of support from the San Antonio community, donors and current UTSA athletes who say it’s “just the right thing to do.” Other Conference USA athletic directors have reached out to her expressing interest in adopting the rule, she said.

“It’s been very moving to our student-athletes and to the constituents that support our student-athletes,” Campos said. “We’re changing a culture.”

‘A matter of when’

Since UTSA adopted the rule, Tracy and McDavis have built a Tracy Rule template and an informational packet to make it as easy as possible for other schools to adopt.

They’ve added a provision requiring schools to conduct criminal background checks on all new recruits. Such an effort could get expensive, Nadolski said. But it would represent a fraction of athletic departments’ annual budgets.

Central Michigan University and some other schools have expressed interest in adopting the rule, Tracy said.

Others have been more reluctant.

The student government at James Madison University, a Division I public school in Virginia, passed a resolution in October encouraging the administration to adopt the Tracy Rule.
University officials initially balked but haven’t ruled out the possibility, said Caroline Whitlow, who heads the campus group Students Against Sexual Violence.

James Madison University spokesman Bill Wyatt said officials worry the rule discriminates against athletes and would be better received if it applied to a larger swath of campus activities and scholarship recipients.

While Whitlow and others don’t necessarily oppose expanding the rule to other student groups, their goal was never to restrict anyone’s right to obtain an education, she said. Playing sports is a privilege, Whitlow said, and it should be contingent on a high standard of conduct.

She added that the rule is no more discriminatory than the random drug testing athletes are subject to.

“If someone is going to be on promotional materials and on the field, gaining access to special class enrollment, tutoring and all of the things that student-athletes receive and deserve, we want to make sure they’re creating the kind of community that most of the student body wants, which is one where sexual violence isn’t tolerated,” Whitlow said.

James Madison is in the NCAA’s Colonial Athletic Association conference. Like many conferences, it has yet to adopt a policy against recruiting athletes disciplined for sexual or other serious misconduct.

Wyden, the Oregon congressman, wants to change that. He was among eight U.S. senators, including presidential candidate Amy Klobuchar, D-Minnesota, to write the commissioners of the Power 5 conferences — the SEC, Pac-12, Big 12, Big Ten and Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) — in February, urging them to act “in the absence of meaningful action by the NCAA.”

Only one of the five commissioners, Larry Scott of the Pac-12, wrote back. In response to a question about implementing transfer policies he wrote, “We are not considering any new or amended policies in this area at this time.”

Wyden dismissed the response as “more kicking the can.” He said he hasn’t heard from the other conferences.

“I don’t get a whole lot of letters where the response is, ‘Hey, we’re really not going to be doing much to respond to what you’re talking about,’” Wyden said. “This needs a much more serious approach and all hands on deck. Right now, I’m not convinced they’re doing a whole lot more than paying lip service.”

Tracy doesn’t expect the NCAA to reverse course anytime soon. But she’s pleased that her groundswell approach is already having an impact.

Including UTSA and the Big Sky schools, Tracy counts 12 NCAA schools that have comprehensive zero-tolerance policies for athletes. She’s going to keep pushing until all of the more than 1,200 have something. “It might take a while, but it’s not a matter of if,” Tracy said. “It’s a matter of when.”
NCAA president deflects blame following USA TODAY investigation

By: Kenny Jacoby

NCAA President Mark Emmert on Tuesday defended his organization and deflected blame to universities just days after a USA TODAY Network investigation found that college athletes punished for sexual assault routinely transfer and keep playing in the NCAA.

His remarks came the same day that the National Organization for Women called on the NCAA to “end the predator pipeline,” evoking the title of the USA TODAY Network investigation.

Emmert, who has dodged the USA TODAY Network’s questions and interview requests for more than a month, made the comment during an Aspen Institute symposium about college-athlete pay. It was in response to an audience question about the investigation.

“When you hear, ‘The NCAA did this or did that,’ just insert, ‘the colleges and universities of America did this or did that,’” Emmert said. “That’s who makes those decisions.”

NCAA president Mark Emmert, shown here at an April 2019 press conference at U.S. Bank Stadium, blamed universities for problems exposed in a USA TODAY Network investigation. [Robert Deutsch/USA TODAY Sports]

When contacted after the investigation, however, the leaders of those same institutions deflected questions back to the NCAA.

The USA TODAY Network sought interviews and comment from all 19 college and university presidents, chancellors and athletic directors who sit on the NCAA’s highest governing body, asking how they will address the problems raised in the investigation.

None would answer. Fourteen ignored the requests. Of those who responded, five tossed it back to the NCAA.

“This inquiry should be directed to the NCAA for a response,” said Texas State University President Denise Trauth, who sits on the NCAA Board of Governors.

‘Repeat offender’

The finger-pointing came amid outcry from survivor advocates and the National Organization for Women, whose president urged the NCAA to institute rigorous and enforceable codes of conduct that prevent teams from “monetizing sexual abuse.”

See Next Page
"The NCAA is a repeat offender when it comes to putting profits over people," NOW President Toni Van Pelt said. "They have continued to let college athletes charged with assault off the hook."

The USA TODAY Network investigation found at least 33 athletes since 2014 who have transferred to NCAA schools despite being administratively or criminally disciplined for sexual offenses at a previous college.

The true number may be far greater, as 5 of every 6 Division I public universities refused to release records from disciplinary proceedings that would help reveal the extent of the problem, even though federal law explicitly allows them to do so.

The NCAA, which cracks down on athletes who accept cash or a free meal, get bad grades or smoke marijuana, outlines no specific penalties for athletes who commit sexual assault. And nothing in its lengthy rulebook restricts suspended, expelled and convicted athletes from transferring to new NCAA schools and leaving past sanctions behind.

"The fact that the Board of Governors will not make a statement and has refused to make a change is complete negligence," said Daisy Tackett, a former University of Kansas rower who, along with another rower, reported being sexually assaulted in 2015 by a Kansas football player.

The football player resurfaced on the Indiana State University team’s roster within months of Kansas finding him responsible in both rowers’ cases and banning him from its campus.

"They have an opportunity in front of them to make campuses and the NCAA a safer place," Tackett said, "but apparently their bottom line and their public image is more important than the countless victims of abusive athletes they’ve emboldened."

In Emmert’s comments at the Washington, D.C.-based symposium, he did not acknowledge the victims of sexual assault – many of whom, like Tackett, were NCAA athletes themselves.

Instead, Emmert said, the NCAA has spent "an enormous amount of time on the issue of the prevention of sexual assault."

"That doesn’t mean that it’s been enough or it’s gone far enough," he added. "If we have one of those cases, that’s very problematic."

Potential for policy

On whether athletes convicted or disciplined for sexual assault should be able to transfer to new NCAA schools, Emmert said, “the member schools decided that those were decisions that really needed to be made at the local level by schools themselves.”

But the Board of Governors, of which Emmert is a non-voting member, in August 2018 shot down a recommendation by its own study group, the Commission to Combat Campus Sexual
Violence, to direct the NCAA divisions to consider legislation for holding such athletes accountable. The board has ignored calls by eight U.S. senators to fix the problem.

At least nine current Board of Governors members, including Emmert, attended that 2018 meeting as board members at the time, minutes show.

A more recent board appointee is Renu Khator, president of the University of Houston, whose basketball team in 2015 recruited one of three players suspended for up to 10 years from the University of Oregon for sexually assaulting a female student a year earlier.

That athlete, Damyean Dotson, played two seasons under Houston head coach Kelvin Sampson after his suspension at Oregon and now plays for the NBA’s New York Knicks.

Khator did not respond to requests for comment, nor did Sampson. Houston athletics did not answer questions about Dotson, instead saying in a statement that officials “spoke with Damyean, his family and former coaches and felt confident in his ability to continue as a student-athlete” at Houston.

Houston is a member of the American Athletic Conference (AAC). But while six of the NCAA’s 33 Division I conferences already have policies and procedures aimed at preventing athletes from competing at their schools if they’ve been disciplined for sexual assault, the AAC is not one of them.

Jon Solomon, editorial director of the Sports & Society Program at the Aspen Institute, asked Emmert in a follow-up question whether the NCAA could adopt one of the conference policies nationally, such as that of the Southeastern Conference (SEC) or Big Sky Conference.

“Potentially,” Emmert said. “All the rules are different, and all of them are complicated. It is an enormously complex issue when you look at the details of it. I think it’s an issue that’s going to routinely be discussed and debated widely.”

But the time for action is now, said Blake McKay, one of two University of Oregon students who in 2016 reported being raped by a Ducks athlete, then-freshman football player Tristen Wallace.

Although the university expelled him for “unwanted penetration” twice — once for each victim — Wallace transferred to a junior college, then to Prairie View A&M University, a Division I school in Texas where he has played the last two seasons.

Board of Governors members have a duty to protect the health and safety of students on their campuses, and their lack of response to the problem and to victims like her leaves her feeling “disappointed,” McKay said.

“It is a bit alarming that someone would be able to read these facts and statistics and not want to immediately put something in place for people and other students to be protected from sexual violence on college campuses,” McKay said. “I would have appreciated the NCAA to take some action because of how much power and dictation they have over these athlete’s lives.”
Louisiana education leaders set early college credit goal

By: The Associated Press

Louisiana education leaders are pushing for all high school graduates within a decade to leave school with college credit or an industry-based credential, a target inline with the state’s new higher education master plan.

The Advocate reports that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, which oversees K-12 public education, and the Board of Regents, which oversees public colleges, adopted the goal for 2029 graduates during a joint meeting Wednesday.

“We are focused on improving talent development in the state of Louisiana,” Commissioner of Higher Education Kim Hunter Reed told the boards.

The goal, if accomplished, would double the current achievement level through courses known as dual-enrollment, in which students take college-level classes for both high school and college credit. Half of the high school graduating class of 2018 earned college credit for at least one course or a marketable industry credential, according to the state Department of Education.

Earlier this year, Gov. John Bel Edwards proposed that all public high school juniors and seniors have access to two courses for college credit without charge. But the governor’s plan never won political traction, partly because it lacked financing.

Louisiana has about 90,000 high school juniors and seniors. Their access to dual enrollment courses varies widely among regions and between rural and urban areas.

Under current rules, students must have a grade point average of at least 2.5 and a 19 on the ACT college readiness test — along with scores of at least 19 in the math portion of the ACT and 18 in English — to take a dual enrollment class. Eligibility requirements likely will change as the target for participation increases.

But expansion of dual enrollment offerings will come with a price tag.

Louisiana is spending about $17 million this budget year for dual enrollment courses. How much it will cost to boost the courses to make them available to more students in line with the target is unclear.

See Next Page
Reed said education leaders may request “seed money” during the 2020 legislative session, then additional dollars in 2021. The target endorsed by the two education boards would first apply to the high school freshmen class of 2025, which would enroll next fall.

Board of Elementary and Secondary Education member Doris Voitier said students who earn college credit in high school typically fare better in college. Voiter, superintendent of the St. Bernard Parish School District, said financing a major expansion of dual enrollment “is something we can work toward and resolve.”

The early college credit goal is part of the Regents’ updated higher education master plan, which set a 2030 target for boosting the percentage of working-age adults with a college degree or industry credential from 44% to 60%. Reed said 56% percent of state jobs will require post-high school training in 2020.

“We are lagging, and we need to be leading,” Reed said.
Where is everybody? UK sees empty seats as a made-for-TV challenge.

By: Jerry Tipton, Tribune News Service

LEXINGTON, Ky. Before every Kentucky home game this season, a short film titled "All Roads" and narrated by Tom Hammond plays on Rupp Arena's video screens. "All roads lead to Lexington ...," the Lexington native and former NBC sportscaster intones. "In Kentucky, we're known by the way we care. In Kentucky, we're one Big Blue Nation."

Borrowing from Stephen Foster, Hammond concludes this video rallying cry by saying, "All roads lead to My Old Kentucky Home."

Judging by the noticeable number of empty seats at several games this season, the roads to Rupp Arena have not been clogged.

More than once, UK Coach John Calipari has appealed to fans to attend games in order to encourage his latest freshman-dependent team. After the victory over Mount St. Mary's, he pointed out that empty seats are "not just a Kentucky issue. It's everywhere."

Or as Big Ten Commissioner Jim Delany said, "If Kentucky is struggling, then just about everybody is struggling.

According to NCAA records, average attendance at Division I games has declined in each of the last 12 seasons. The average attendance for 2019 NCAA Tournament games was the lowest for that event since 2001.

And Kentucky basketball is not the only iconic college program making the wrong kind of attendance news. Notre Dame football's streak of home sellouts ended in a Nov. 16 game against Navy. Until then, Notre Dame had sold out 273 straight home games.

Speaking of college football, average attendance at Division I FBS games has declined in each of the last five seasons. And Friday night's Pac-12 championship game between Utah and Oregon, played in Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, Calif., drew just more than half that venue's capacity (38,679 fans for 68,500 seats).

When asked to explain the empty seats, several people cited television as a factor.

"Sometimes, especially against a lesser opponent, it's easier to stay home and watch it on television," Hammond said.

Random interviews before Kentucky played Lamar sent a message that fans still care. A couple from Winchester, Billy and Shawna Hamilton, celebrated their fourth wedding anniversary at the game. Two days earlier, Billy underwent a heart catheterization procedure.

See next page
The Hamiltons sat in section 240, a section reserved for students above the E-Rupp-tion Zone that had been largely empty for more than one early-season game.

"I think we get a better perspective on TV," Billy said. "Especially when you're in the nose bleed (seats)."

Television also provides instant replays, commentary, relatively inexpensive viewing and no waiting in line for refreshments, while also negating the hassle of parking and travel to and from.

UK officials have pondered the empty seats. As Guy Ramsey, the director of strategic communications, said, "We view our greatest competition for fans coming to games as simply staying at home."

To compete with television, UK seeks to create "the most engaging atmosphere that we can," Ramsey said. Hence, there is music, videos, replays, T-shirts fired into the stands, on-court hosts Ravi Moss and Maria Montgomery, indoor fireworks, a fan shooting a half-court shot and "Wizard of Oz" plumes of gas shot into the air.

Television presents a catch-22. College programs want the exposure and revenue produced by selling the rights to televise games. But televising games might cause a sizable number of people to stay home and watch the game.

"I don't think you get out of that box," Ramsey said. "Because both ends of it are too important in who we are and what we do. (Without) the money that comes from television, we could not compete at the level we do. At the same time, without incredible game-day atmosphere and revenue that comes from fans coming to games, we can't do it either.

"There's no getting out of the box. We have to strike the right balance."

Twin sisters who sat in Section 214 at the Lamar game, Lisa Pigman and Diane Sawyer, said ticket prices prevent some fans from attending. Season-ticket prices range from $950 per seat in the upper arena to the first four rows closest to the court: $1,500 per seat with a required $5,000 K Fund donation per seat.

Deputy director of athletics DeWayne Peevy said that ticket prices are not a significant factor. UK sold almost all its season tickets for 2019-20.

"So, the issue in terms of attendance is not people buying the seats," Ramsey said. "It's people actually buying the seats and not attending the game."

The announced attendance and actual number of people in seats reflect this disparity. UK's announced attendance, which is based roughly on tickets sold, averaged 19,821 going into Saturday's game against Fairleigh Dickinson. In that same six-game period, the scanned count of people with tickets, media credentials and other passes that have a bar code averaged 14,161. That translates into about 28% of ticket holders not coming to games.

Numbers aside, Hammond summed it up by saying of the empty expanse for some games in Section 240, "I never thought I'd see that at Rupp Arena."
Among conferences, the Big Ten has led the nation in average attendance for men's basketball every season since 1975-76. Commissioner Jim Delany said the Big Ten has been studying how to boost attendance for at least 10 years.

"It's a matter of wanting to see quality games," he said. "And in a lot of cases, quality games have to be conference games or strong opponents from other conferences or (teams) that are certainly situated in the basketball ecosphere."

The Big Ten expanded its conference schedule from 16 to 20 games. It mandated two conference games be played in November or early December. "So we don't try to avoid the football, but leverage the football," Delany said.

Delany envisions the Big Ten someday staging a football-basketball weekend featuring, say, two Michigan-Ohio State games.

The Big Ten also jumped at the chance to replace the Big East in a made-for-TV challenge with ACC teams, Delany said. And eight Big Ten teams annually play in the Gavitt Games, which honor former basketball luminary Dave Gavitt. Michigan State played at Seton Hall in one such game this season.

The Big Ten coaches have been supportive of these moves to play more attractive games, Delany said.

"They said, 'Well, someday, we'll be playing everybody twice,'" Delany said. "I said, 'I hope so. You know, why not? Why wouldn't you play 26 conference games?'

"It's what people want. It's what the players want. It's what television wants. Why wouldn't you? You cannot bring some of the teams being brought into our arenas and expect people to be enthusiastic about those games."

UK deputy director of athletics DeWayne Peevy acknowledged that low profile of UK's home opponents so far had been a factor in attendance. "I'm not crazy enough to think the opponents that we play don't have an impact," he said.
‘He’s just gotta let it go’: Alex Wright a force for UAB in freshman season

By: Evan Dudley

Deep among the thick pine forests in the southeast corner of Alabama, nestled along the Pea River, lies the small town of Elba.

And hidden from plain sight, tucked away from lightly paved asphalt and tranquil downtown streets, is an incongruous laboratory filled with the latest advancements in the continued experimentation and development in the latest line of Dr. Frankenstein’s Monster.

Alex Wright, one of these physically intimidating specimens, managed to escape the confines of his hellish creation and is now terrorizing Conference USA backfields with impunity, culminating in a selection to the C-USA All-Freshman team following an impressive debut season for the UAB Blazers.

“Coming in, I just had to get the feel of things,” Wright said. “Feeling out the first few games, trusting in my coach and techniques he gave me, I did what I did and God took care of the rest.”

Wright was a 3-star prospect coming of high school and received little to no attention until the summer before his senior season at Elba. After attending a summer camp at UAB in July 2018, he caught the eye of outside linebackers coach Nick Gentry, a standout at Alabama under Nick Saban who was named Defensive Co-MVP of the 2011 season with NFL second-round pick Courtney Upshaw, and ultimately committed to the Blazers before leaving Birmingham.

Making it official during the early signing period of the 2019 recruiting cycle, Wright didn’t make it to campus until the summer but bolted up the depth chart at JACK linebacker, behind senior Fitzgerald Mofor, during an impressive fall camp.

“I recruited down there in that area when I was at Jacksonville State for almost 3-4 years,” Gentry said. “I actually knew his coach (Pate Harrison) when he as at Dale County. He kept telling me that he had a big long kid at Elba when he got the job over there. I got into recruiting him a little bit, watched a little bit of his film, and got him up to a camp in the summer and he amazed me. I knew right then that was my No. 1 guy.”

Wright has played in every game so far in his true freshman season, starting twice against Rice and UTSA, and heads into the New Orleans Bowl with 28 total tackles (8.5 for loss), 4.5 sacks, three quarterback hurries, two fumble recoveries and a forced fumble.

For his efforts, Wright was named to the C-USA All-Freshman Team, along with quarterback Dylan Hopkins.
"It’s a true blessing, a true blessing," he said. "I thank God for that and for letting me go out and show my talents. My teammates all congratulated me on it which made it better. Very happy."

Much like former edge rushers Jamell Garcia-Williams and Stacy Keely, and current SAM linebacker Jordan Smith, Wright brings impressive size and length to the position with his 6-4, 235-pound frame. Despite Wright keeping within the mold, Gentry, an undersized outside linebacker during his college days, expects the same kind of effort and production no matter the dimensions of the athlete.

"If you can play, you can play," Gentry said. "It doesn’t matter what the size is, but length does help. You can’t coach it, that’s one thing about it. He’s (Wright) a different breed of length. He’s got a lot of power, and he doesn’t really realize how much power he really has and how he can really handle an offensive lineman."

"If he ever figures it out, he’s got a lot of first-round ability," he added. "I’ve been around a lot of first-rounders’ that I played with at Alabama, and he has that type of ability. He’s just got to let it go."

Length and strength are obvious advantages in taking on C-USA offensive linemen but the finer details of the craft are what has allowed Wright to flourish early in his career. Although only a freshman, Gentry sees the young Wright growing into a more dominating force for the Blazers.

"His understanding of using his body," Gentry said. "He’s got a lot of range and he’s going to do a few different things than anybody else in the group. Him and Jordan (Smith) are a lot alike in some areas, but they’ve also got their different qualities and he can do things Jordan can’t do. A lot of it is based off his power, but mainly it’s just growing, maturity-wise, and understanding that he’s a grown man in a little kid’s body."

"If I’m being honest, he’s going to be a 285-295-pound man before he leaves here," he added. "I guarantee you that. He’s got to continue to be mature and handle the pressure that’s coming to him. Don’t get big-headed and the rest will take care of itself." Wright also understands the importance of humility and the small-town kid from Elba has no problem in keeping his wits and his ego about him.

"With confidence, I always keep myself humble," he said. "I just keep working and perfecting my craft. It’s never too late to improve and there’s always something else you can learn to make yourself and the team better."

For a monstrosity created to exact devastation on opposing quarterbacks, Wright has invariably picked up the off the field personality of his warm soul teammates like Mofor.

"He’s probably one of the more humble people I’ve ever met off the field," Gentry said. "On the field, he’s a monster and he’s going to be a beast. He does his job and he does it violently. But off the field? Respectful, yes sir and no sir, whatever it is, he’s got the whole package and just got to keep running with it."
Recapping early signing day for UAB

By: Evan Dudley

The NCAA early signing period started Wednesday and the UAB football program all but wrapped up its 2020 recruiting class with 11 signees before making the flight to New Orleans for its third straight bowl appearance.

“We signed a very talented class that will come in and make immediate contributions,” UAB head coach Bill Clark said. “We have been building a foundation since 2017 and didn’t have many spots, but feel like we capitalized on the positional needs we had.”

Unfortunately for Clark and his staff, they’ve had to deal with bowl-game travel during the early signing period in the last three seasons. However, the Blazers have adapted to the modern age to make the traditionally stressful time a breeze.

“I think for us, if we can survive signing guys in the Bahamas, there’s nothing we can’t do,” Clark said. “At that time, the faxes had pretty much gone out. We were still emailing. Obviously now, they can take pictures and send them. It’s a lot easier, but making it through that was really great preparation for anything we have moving forward. We’ve learned how to handle this early signing day.”

Here’s a breakdown of UAB’s early signees:

Preps

The Blazers pulled seven total players from high school ranks with three Georgia prospects, two from Alabama and one each from Florida and Tennessee.


Taylor, a 3-star prospect out of James Clemons, is the 76th overall player in Alabama and was a starter last weekend in the Alabama-Mississippi All-Star Classic. Bedosky and Flournoy are Georgia natives and chose the Blazers over offers from Appalachian State, Chattanooga and Coastal Carolina.

McBride was a late commitment for UAB and the 3-star, hailing from Ocala, Florida, chose the Blazers as well over Appalachian State, Chattanooga and Coastal Carolina.

Defensively, the Blazers added two linebackers and a defensive back to the fold with 3-star Gadsden City linebacker Allen Merrick headlining the trio.

Merrick is the 37th-ranked player in Alabama and the No. 41 inside linebacker in the country, according to the 247Sports Composite, and picked UAB over FAU and Kentucky.
Brown, out of Kirby High School in Memphis, Tennessee, is a 3-star outside linebacker that was ranked the 35th best player in Tennessee and was selected as an Auto Zone Liberty Bowl High School All-Star.

One of the surprises of the day was Armani Maddox out of Hapeville Charter School in Atlanta, Georgia. The 3-star safety chose UAB over offers from Kentucky and Maryland.

**JUCOs**

Although Clark has made a transition to more prep-heavy classes, he still finds time to dip into the junior college pool.

The Blazers pulled four total JUCO athletes beginning with Garden City (Kan.) tight end Maleak Bryant. A 3-star prospect and No. 2 tight end in the JUCO ranks, according to the 247Sports Composite, Bryant chose UAB over Marshall and Southern Miss.

Kelle Sanders, a 3-star outside linebacker, originally signed with Washington State as a quarterback but transferred to Independence (Kan.) and emerged as a standout defender on the edge.

UAB signed two Mississippi JUCO defensive linemen with former Carver-Montgomery and Northeast Mississippi CC standout Isaiah Forte joining Tylan Jones, who helped lead Mississippi Gulf Coast CC to the 2019 NJCAA national championship.

**What’s left?**

The Blazers still hold commitments from 3-star defensive back Decarrion McWilliams, the younger brother of current UAB defensive lineman Fish McWilliams, and 3-star offensive lineman Brady Wilson out of Spanish Fort.

McWilliams had a stellar senior season at Pine Forest in Pensacola, Florida, and could be testing the waters after receiving more interest late this fall. Wilson chose not to sign Wednesday and could be waiting until National Signing Day in February.

Late Wednesday night, 2-star Thompson defensive lineman Eric Mizell made his commitment to UAB in a Twitter post.

**SIGNED LETTER OF INTENT (11)**

* Ta’Marious Brown, 3-star OLB (6-2 / 210) Kirby | Memphis, Tenn.
* Maleak Bryant, 3-star TE (6-6 / 255) Garden City CC (Kan.) | Atlanta, Ga.
* Zaire Flournoy, 2-star OT (6-3 / 290) Chapel Hill | Douglasville, Ga.
*Isaiah Forte, 3-star DE (6-3 / 309) Northeast CC (Miss.) | Montgomery, Ala.

*Tylan Jones, 2-star DT (6-3 / 305) Mississippi Gulf Coast CC (Miss.) | Lake Cormorant, Miss.

*Armani Maddox, 3-star S (6-0 / 170) Hapeville Charter | Atlanta, Ga.

*Dwayne McBride, 3-star RB (5-11 / 212) Vanguard | Ocala, Fla.

*Allen Merrick, 3-star ILB (6-2 / 255) Gadsden City | Gadsden, Ala.

*Kelle Sanders, 3-star OLB (6-6 / 240) Independence CC (Kan.) | Lacey, Wash.

*Zach Taylor, 3-star OT (6-6 / 310) James Clemens | Madison, Ala.

Verbal Commits (2)

*Dacarrion McWilliams, 3-star CB (5-10 / 175) Pine Forest | Pensacola, Fla.

*Eric Mizell, 2-star DE (6-2 / 266) Thompson | Alabaster, Ala.

*Brady Wilson, 3-star OC (6-1 / 275) Spanish Fort | Spanish Fort, Ala.
UAB prepares for No. 20 Appalachian State in New Orleans Bowl

By: Evan Dudley

As the late great Professor Longhair would say, “If you go to New Orleans, you ought to go see the Mardi Gras.”

Unfortunately, Fat Tuesday is still two months away, but there’s still reason for the season with the UAB football team taking part in its third straight bowl game to end the 2019 season.

The Blazers (9-4, 6-2 CUSA) head to the Big Easy as they take on No. 20 Appalachian State (12-1, 7-1 Sun Belt) in the 2019 R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl, Saturday, Dec. 21, at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Kickoff is scheduled for 8 p.m. CT on ESPN.

“Excited for these guys to get their legs back under them,” UAB head coach Bill Clark said. “App State, what a great program. Reminds me of how I felt at Prattville those last few years when you just plug in different people. Consistency. They’re good on both sides of the ball and special teams. A huge challenge for us and excited about going to New Orleans, a new setting for us.”

Coming off a 49-6 loss to FAU in the league title game, the coaching staff hit the recruiting trail for a week before reconvening in Birmingham for bowl preparations. The team spent the week finishing final exams following a 15-week season gauntlet and is now all the more equipped to shake the shame from an embarrassing loss to the Owls in Boca Raton.

“I think it was something that was well-needed,” left tackle Colby Ragland said. “We’ve been going non-stop all year. You have an offseason but you’re grinding and working. Just to have a week after a long season and a tough loss, it kind of resets your mind and your body a little bit. Flush out all the soreness and stuff. I think it was very important and we were all grateful for it.”

“In my opinion, I think everybody is ready,” he added. “Even though the work is not done yet, it’s only Tuesday and we still got a lot of time, but as soon as that game (C-USA title game loss) was over, we were looking forward to the bowl game. How can we get a W to get that tough loss out of our minds? We look at it as a challenge but also a great opportunity.”

The Blazers were beset by an easy schedule early in the season and struggled with more formidable opponents later in the year.

Despite the lack of offensive identity, UAB’s defense held its own in regular-season losses to Western Kentucky, Tennessee and Southern Miss, but was gashed for more than 500 yards by FAU in the C-USA title game.
A sour taste remains for the defense but an opportunity to rebound against a daunting offense presents itself in Appalachian State.

“It’s a little difficult because we had a tough loss in the championship game,” junior linebacker Kris Moll said. “But it’s also good for us to have an extra game to redeem ourselves and to show that wasn’t us in that game. This a good team and we have a great chance to show a lot of people otherwise.”

Appalachian State has made a seamless transition to the FBS level, from an FCS powerhouse, and won three consecutive FCS national championships (2005-2007) before making the move to the Sun Belt Conference in 2014. However, the Mountaineers may be best known for their shocking upset of No. 5 Michigan in the 2007 season opener at Michigan Stadium in Ann Arbor. The victory was the first-ever win over a ranked FBS team by an FCS opponent in the history of college football.

The roles have reserved from UAB’s perspective as the Blazers attempt to knock off their first ranked opponent since 2011 while creating momentum for a team that loses only seven starters and 14 seniors overall.

“It’s almost like it’s flipped for us,” Clark said. “If you look at them being a Top-25 team and what they’ve done this year in beating South Carolina and North Carolina, and winning their conference again. For us, it’s also a chance to preview next year’s team. We want to see what our group does next year. A preview of next year’s team for us going against a Top-25 team and it’s a huge deal for us.”

It wouldn’t be the postseason in New Orleans without a bevy of distractions to draw attention away from the task at hand. Cocktail napkins, folks. However, the Blazers seem more intent on finishing business before taking in beignets and coffee in front of Jackson Square.

“We’re going over there to play a game, we’re not going for vacation,” Moll said. “We all know that and we all should have the same goal. We can have our fun afterward. I told the team I’m not going down there to lose, I’m going to win.”

“It gives us a chip on our shoulder,” he added. “We always have a chip on our shoulder every week but this is big time. We’re not even ranked right now and they are, so this can give us a good name.”
Al.com
Wednesday, December 18, 2019

Know your UAB bowl foe: Appalachian State

By: Evan Dudley

It’s bowl week for the UAB football program and with it the end of another successful season on the Southside.

The Blazers (9-4, 6-2 C-USA) face off against No. 20 Appalachian State (12-1, 7-1 Sun Belt) in the 2019 R+L Carriers New Orleans Bowl, Saturday, Dec. 21, at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans, Louisiana. Kickoff is set for 8 p.m. CT on ESPN.

The Mountaineers are the first ranked team UAB will play since hosting No. 18 Marshall at Legion Field in the final home game of the 2014 season. The Blazers are 2-17 all-time against ranked opponents but 14-11 against Sun Belt Conference foes.

Here are five things to know about UAB’s bowl opponent Appalachian State:

1. Movin’ On Up

Appalachian State, arguably, has the best transition from the FCS to FBS levels in the history of Division I football.

The Mountaineers won three consecutive Division I FCS National Championships (2005-2007) and seven SoCon titles in a decade-long period before taking the leap to the FBS in 2014 as a member of the Sun Belt Conference. Additionally, Appalachian State upset No. 5 Michigan in its 2007 season opener to become the first FCS team to defeat a ranked FBS team.

Since 2016, the Mountaineers have claimed the last four Sun Belt titles and are playing in their fifth straight bowl game and second straight New Orleans Bowl.

2. Feels Like the First Time

Not only are the Mountaineers playing in consecutive New Orleans Bowls, but they’re also playing without the head coach that led them there for a second straight year.

Scott Satterfield accepted the Louisville job and resigned from Appalachian State before last year’s New Orleans Bowl, and Eliah Drinkwitz did the same this season after accepting the head coach position at Missouri.

However, the loss of their head coach was no problem for the Mountaineers as they dominated Middle Tennessee State, 45-13, in the 2018 New Orleans Bowl.

3. She Blinded Me with Science

Offensively, Appalachian State makes its living on the ground and has used the running game to strengthen a unit that ranks ninth in scoring offense (39.4 ppg), 17th in rushing offense (229.2 ypg) and 42nd in total offense (435.5).
The Blazers switched from a productive passing attack early this season to a more run-dominated scheme that led to three straight wins before coming unglued in the C-USA title game. For the season, UAB’s offense ranks 100th in the scoring (23.6 ppg) and 105th in total offense (352.9 ypg).

Defensively, UAB is one of the top units in the nation but the Mountaineers are not too shabby themselves. Appalachian State ranks 27th in total defense (335.9 ypg) and 22nd in scoring defense (20.2 ppg), and is also 14th in third-down defense (31.4 percent) and eighth in turnover margin (+12).

4. (No) Return of the MAC

After two straight bowl games featuring MAC opponents, the Blazers get Sun Belt champion Appalachian State.

The Mountaineers lost a 3-point heartbreaker to Georgia Southern midway through the season but claimed wins over North Carolina and South Carolina on the road this year. In addition to setting a record for total wins in a season of any Division I FBS team in North Carolina, Appalachian State landed six first-team All-Sun Belt selections and eight second-team picks.

Running back Darrynton Evans won Sun Belt Offensive Player of the Year following an impressive junior season that included 1,323 rushing yards and 22 total touchdowns. Senior linebacker Akeem Davis-Gaither was named Sun Belt Defensive Player of the Year after collecting 95 tackles (14 for loss), 4.5 sacks, six quarterback hurries, six pass breakups, a block and an interception.

Appalachian State is also the first ranked team the Blazers have faced since losing the final home game of Bill Clark’s inaugural season to No. 18 Marshall. The UAB program was shut down a little more than one week later following its 2014 season-ending win over Southern Miss.

5. Don’t Fear the Reaper

Appalachian State has a wealth of success against current members of C-USA with a 24-13 overall record, but only five of those games have occurred since the Mountaineers moved to the FBS level.

Marshall, Middle Tennessee State, Southern Miss and Western Kentucky all faced the Mountaineers in lower classifications and divisions, but only the Golden Eagles and Blue Raiders have matched up with Appalachian State since its transition in 2014.

Following a loss to Southern Miss in 2014, the Mountaineers have reeled off three straight wins over C-USA foes Charlotte and Old Dominion.

The Blazers, on the other side, have a 13-11 overall record against Sun Belt opponents and a 3-1 record under Clark. However, Clark is 0-1 against ranked opponents and the program as a whole is only 2-17 in its history.
Davis, Abrams earn career highs in UA win against UNC

By: Staff Report

Sophomores Brittany Davis and Megan Abrams played lights out to lead Alabama past previously undefeated North Carolina, 83-77, inside Coleman Coliseum Sunday afternoon. Davis poured in a career-high 23 points, while Abrams tallied a career-best 21 points in the victory. With its second consecutive win, the Crimson Tide improves to 7-3, while North the Tar Heels suffered their first loss of the season and fall to 8-1.

Davis’ 23 points led the Tide in scoring, while sophomore Abrams bested her previous career-high of 19 points with 21 on Sunday. Junior Ariyah Copeland had her third consecutive game in double figures, scoring 12 points and grabbing nine rebounds and sophomore De’Sha Benjamin contributed 11 points in the win.

“It was just a great win against a really good North Carolina team that’s going to have a lot of success this season,” said head coach Kristy Curry. “I’m just really proud of our kid’s toughness.” Alabama got off to a hot start, jumping out to an 11-3 lead after the first four minutes of play.

Both teams traded leads in the final period, before the Tide pulled ahead 79-72 with 2:29 on the clock. The Tar Heels cut the lead to two with 1:31 remaining, but a clutch jumper with a toe on the three-point line from Benjamin gave Alabama the four-point edge with 23 seconds to go. It was Benjamin that sealed the game for good by knocking down two free throws with three seconds left, giving Alabama the 83-77 victory.

Davis was on fire, shooting 10-of-12 (83 percent) from the field and 3-of-5 (60 percent) from beyond the arc.

Senior Ashley Knight became Alabama’s all-time career block leader with three blocks in Sunday’s game. Knight passed UA great Yolanda Watkins and currently has 188 blocks for her career.

Copeland was one rebound shy of recording her seventh career double-double with 12 points and nine rebounds. The Tide controlled the boards, out-rebounding the Tar Heels 42-35 for the game.

“I think any time you can out-rebound North Carolina the way we did down the stretch on a plus-eight situation, and the balance we had with four players in double figures, is really key. I thought our bench really helped us. I’m just really proud of our kids today,” Curry said. “And it’s Ariyah’s (Copeland) birthday. These kids really wanted to get that win for her birthday. It’s Eli Gold’s birthday, so we had a couple special birthdays today that were really special to our program, so it’s just a good win.”

Alabama will play its fourth game of its six-game home stretch Tuesday when it takes on Bethune-Cookman in the annual 5th Grade Fastbreak game. Tipoff is set for 11:30 a.m. and will be broadcast on SEC Network+.
Tough way for Alabama to lose on the road

By: Staff Report

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. — The elements for a blowout — a shorthanded team on the road, foul trouble on two key players were in place. Instead, Alabama managed to play Penn State to the final possession with a chance to tie or win the game.

The problem was, no potentially heroic shot ever came.

Despite inbounding the ball in the frontcourt with 5.8 second to play, the Crimson Tide’s final possession fizzled and Penn State survived with a 73-71 victory on Saturday.

Alabama had cut the Penn State lead to 72-71 on a Javian Davis layup with 1:19 to play and had a chance to take the lead with 32 seconds to go, but could not convert a lob pass to Alex Reese. Melvin Watkins was fouled with 12.5 seconds to play and made one free throw. The Crimson Tide brought the ball across mid-court and called its final time out with 5.3 seconds remaining.

“We were looking to get Kira (Lewis) off a ball screen going downhill,” Alabama head coach Nate Oats said. “We were going to try to get a two, not a three because teams really play to stop the 3-pointer in that situation.

“They denied Kira and the ball went into Reese. If I’d had another time out, I’d have called it That’s not on Reese. That’s on me for not having us in a better play.”

Reese was unable to get open and tossed the ball wildly at the goal but it went out of bounds, sealing the Nittany Lion win.

Alabama led by as many as nine points in the second half despite getting less production than usual from Lewis and John Petty, who was saddled with foul trouble for most of the game and fouled out prior to the final UA possession. However, Penn State star Lamar Stephens — who finished with 18 points, 11 rebounds, six assists and five blocks — led a comeback that put the Nittany Lions in a position to weather the final Alabama effort.

“We really played hard but we ran out of energy in the last eight minutes,” Oats said. “When Herb (Jones), Beetle (Bolden) and Reese haven’t practiced all week, that makes it tough for them to have anything left at the end.

“We didn’t shoot the ball well, but if we get an effort like we did today, we can still win a lot of ball games.”

Bolden came off the bench to lead Alabama with 15 points. Reese added 12 points and eight rebounds for the Crimson Tide, now 4-5.

UA will be back in action on Wednesday, playing Samford at Birmingham’s Legacy Arena.
Ole Miss has their modern-day rebel

By: Joseph Goodman

Lane Kiffin might have grown up with a silver football spoon in his mouth, but he is a man of the people now.

And when I say people, I mean the Twitter people. The Twitter people love a good meme, and they love a good troll.

Kiffin is both, and it’s good to have him back in the SEC, a conference that was getting too corporate and boring. The league was so stale before Ed Orgeron showed up at LSU. Now we get Kiffin at Ole Miss, too?

What’s next, Urban Meyer at the USC no one saw coming?

After years of bland hires, the SEC is starting to feel fun again. Eat your hearts out, independent corporate search firms that almost ruined everything. Eat some Rolaid or Tums, Greg Sankey.

After that embarrassing Egg Bowl and the nationally infamous unsportsmanlike conduct penalty, it felt like Ole Miss fired Matt Luke out of shame and disgrace. Maybe so, but then instead of hiring someone safe, they doubled down on crazy. Ole Miss is going to own the black hat now, and Lane is the heel the SEC badly needed.

He might never win a football game in Tuscaloosa, but Kiffin is already winning the Internet in his first week in Oxford. That’s enough for Twitter, which, as they say, is only here for the comments.

On Twitter, Kiffin is like a millennial’s Steve Spurrier. On the field? No one really knows what to expect, and that’s exciting, too.

This much we know for a certainty. If Kiffin ever beats Nick Saban, the Twitter machine will enjoy itself like it never has before.

Kiffin doesn’t have to beat Saban to be successful in his first few seasons, though. He just has to troll Saban and Alabama, and be the meme he was always meant to be. Thanks to Kiffin, Ole Miss is now relevant again.

It’s only the Internet, but it’s a start. Saban, meanwhile, says he doesn’t text or email.

What Saban does have is substance, and a lot of it, but who needs that on the interwebs? Did Kiffin actually have any chance of stealing assistant coaches from his old boss? Heck no, but that doesn’t matter to Twitter.

It was all about pestering Alabama before early national signing day. It’s coming up next Wednesday.

Troll Tide Troll, Lane.

If Orgeron, named ESPN’s national coach of the year on Thursday night, is the best thing to happen to the SEC in a long time, then Kiffin is the youngest. Both are culturally relevant in their
own ways, and in the SEC that place where culture and football meet is always an interesting crossroads.

Culturally speaking, Ole Miss has been suffering from an identity crisis for years now. Well, not anymore. In Kiffin, they’ve found their modern-day rebel.

He’s going to go after Saban’s recruits, and he’s not going to stop. He might even flip one or two this weekend.

Kiffin is going to needle and tease and annoy Alabama every chance he gets.

It’s not because he’s obsessed with Saban, and it’s not because Kiffin is still mad about being fired before the national championship game. This is just what Kiffin does. This is who he is, God bless him. Once a troll, always a troll.

People might have forgotten this by now, but Kiffin did the exact same thing with Urban Meyer when Meyer was dominating the SEC East at Florida. When Kiffin was hired at Tennessee, he made it his mission to make Meyer angry.

Kiffin accused Meyer of cheating, and then Kiffin committed recruiting violations. He also had Tennessee boosters purchase billboard space along Interstate 95 in Broward County near high schools where Meyer was recruiting players. Don’t be surprised if a few Ole Miss billboards start popping up throughout Alabama, and especially in Alabama recruiting hotbeds like Birmingham and Mobile.

Kiffin learned from his mistakes at Tennessee and Alabama, but that doesn’t mean he’s reformed. He’s just a born-again rebel in Rebel country now, a mascot and meme, and Christmas has come early for Twitter.
No. 1 prospect Demouy Kennedy of Theodore signs with Alabama

By: Ben Thomas

After an early commitment to Auburn and a late push by SEC Champion LSU, Theodore 5-star linebacker Demouy Kennedy ended up right where he wanted.

Kennedy, the No. 1 recruit in the state and a Sports Illustrated All-American, signed with Alabama early Wednesday. He expects to enroll in January.

“It feels great,” he said following a ceremony at his school. “I’m just blessed to be able to sign and go to the University after all the hard work I put in. This day made it all worth it.”

Kennedy admitted the last few weeks have been tough with LSU coach Ed Orgeron visiting the school and trying to close the gap on Alabama.

“I was very stressed with school and the recruiting process,” he said. “I really didn’t know where I wanted to go. I obviously had some great choices. In the end, it was Alabama. I felt at home there.”

Theodore veteran coach Eric Collier has called Kennedy “the best athlete he’s ever coached.” He finished this season – one in which he battled through several injuries – with 73 tackles. He also ran for 273 yards and five touchdowns on just 18 carries out of the Wildcat formation.

“He may need a year on the campus to get acclimated,” Collier told AL.com earlier this year. “But, after that, he’ll be a starter for three years and get drafted if he stays healthy. I could see him leave college early. He has that type of potential in the SEC.”

Kennedy’s signing day table on Wednesday included three helmets -- Theodore, Alabama and LSU. But he revealed a large display on the stage behind him with a Roll Tide sign and assorted crimson and white balloons.

The 6-foot-3, 205-pound Kennedy played in the Alabama-Mississippi All-Star Classic last weekend. He was slated to play in the Under Armour All-American Game in Orlando, Fla., on Jan. 2 but will not play due to injury. Collier revealed Wednesday Kennedy played with a torn labrum most of the year and will have surgery in the next few weeks.

‘He grinds. He works his butt off,” Collier said. “He never once questioned anything. Once we had the doctor check him out, and they told him it was fine for him to play, he wanted to play through it for his team, and he did that.”

Collier said Kennedy might have had the surgery earlier, but he wanted to play in game in Hattiesburg, Miss., last weekend.

See Next Page
Kennedy finished his junior season with 100 tackles, including 15 for a loss, and 12 sacks. He also intercepted two passes for the Bobcats, who won the Class 7A, Region 1 title. He committed to Auburn the summer before his junior season but de-committed last March. He committed to Alabama in June.

Kennedy is the No. 11 prospect in AL.com’s Southern 120, a ranking of the top senior prospects in the 10 state SEC footprint.

Collier joked Wednesday that Kennedy started his high school career at wide receiver as a sophomore.

When did that change?

“Quickly,” he joked. “He was on our scout team so he was playing scout team defense. He made four or five plays, and we were like, ‘Hey, we got a look at this.’ It took off from there.”

Collier said he was proud for Kennedy, for Theodore High and the community.

“Demouy is a great young man,” he said. “He represents us well. He’s one of the hardest workers I’ve ever been around.”
Alabama still has recruiting to do after early signing period

By: Brett Hudson

Most of the University of Alabama’s 2020 signing class is done, with 22 signatures collected on Wednesday and many of them at the premium positions of pass rushers, quarterback and running backs.

The work is far from done.

“We do have room to continue to recruit several other players. We’re actually excited about that, as well,” UA coach Nick Saban said.

The advent of the early signing period in college football, this being the third, has created an interesting recruiting window for schools between the early signing period and the February one, this year starting on Feb. 5. Most schools have done most of the heavy lifting — Power 5 schools currently average 18.1 signees per team, according to the 247 Sports Composite — giving schools several weeks to put all their effort into a trimmed list of priorities, Alabama included.

Quarterback and running back are unlikely to be positions UA recruits between now and Feb. 5. The late flip of four-star Jase McClellan from Oklahoma to UA gives Alabama three running backs in the 2020 class — alongside Roydell Williams and Kyle Edwards — and it typically doesn’t take more than that. UA has signed three or fewer running backs in each of its last four recruiting classes before this one, which has three.

UA’s early signing group only included two offensive lineman — four-star Javion Cohen from Phenix City, Alabama, and three-star Seth McLaughlin from Buford, Georgia — but UA could add to that with current commit Damieon George signing in February. It could also turn current commit Jayson Jones of Calera, listed as a defensive lineman on 247 Sports, into an offensive lineman.

UA could also bolster its defensive tackle position with Jamil Burroughs, a four-star from Powder Springs, Georgia, signing in February. He flipped his commitment from Georgia to Alabama during the regular season.

The final UA commit that did not sign Wednesday was wide receiver Javon Baker, a high school teammate of Burroughs’.
“Wide receiver, always try to recruit one year in advance not knowing for sure the future of that position in some ways,” Saban said.

Also on the offensive side of the ball, Saban said UA could add another tight end in addition to three-star signee Caden Clark. Darnell Washington is the top prize, a five-star from Las Vegas who will announce his commitment during the Under Armour All-American Game on Jan. 2.

UA will also be in the race for McKinnley Jackson, a four-star defensive lineman from Lucedale, Mississippi, whose recruitment is quite the battle for many SEC schools.

UA’s early signing period group is enough to fill the team’s primary needs of the recruiting class, and now it hits the road to find even more depth.
National Signing Day brings no surprises

By: Cecil Hurt

The rich always get richer on National Signing Day. Perhaps they get richer every day, but that’s a different matter and we are talking College Football here.

So it came as no surprise that when the instant rankings were released on Wednesday night, the names weren’t just familiar but were downright redundant.

As a quick aside, there is no reason to refer to the December signing day as the “early” signing period.

Ninety percent or so of the Top 250 prospects, depending on which ranking service you follow, sign in December now. Thus, it makes more sense to refer to February as the “late” signing period and December as the default date for all but a few players who prolong the anticipation. Alabama remains involved with a couple of those.

But whether you call it “early” or “late,” the signing period is the Predictable Signing Period — so much so that one wonders if it will eventually be a part of the playoff expansion debate.

There have been a few playoff outliers over the short history of the College Football Playoff. Alabama has faced Michigan State and Washington along the way. But for the most part, the playoff has been comprised of some combination of Clemson, Ohio State, Oklahoma and someone — usually Alabama — from the Southeastern Conference.

LSU earned the SEC spot this year but I don’t think that comprises some sort of proletarian revolution in terms of the talented teams getting all the spots.

For everyone else, it’s an issue. Outgoing Big Ten commissioner Jim Delany said this week that the “fastest way” to expand the playoff would be to leave out the SEC or the ACC (that is, Clemson, since the rest of that league is supremely ignorable.)

The problem there, of course, that when you start making arbitrary decisions to exclude the teams with the best players, then what exactly are you playing for?

The general consensus of recruiting rankings for the 2020 Class is No. 1 Clemson (with a highly-rated quarterback, the other key ingredient in having a team that can win the playoff), followed by No. 2 Alabama, No. 3 LSU, No. 4 Ohio State, then Georgia, Oregon and Oklahoma.

That’s three teams in the SEC fighting each other and one dominant team per each of the other conferences. Oregon seems to be establishing an ascendancy in the Pac-12. The SEC is a dogfight and the other three leagues have a clear-cut king.
Does anyone want to wager that the majority of the Playoff teams for the next four years won’t come from that group? Of course not.

So there is a chicken-or-egg question at work. Do those teams usually get into the Playoff because they have the best players? Or do they always get the best players because they perennially make the Playoff?

The two-week buildup and constant television exposure on ESPN makes the Playoff the sport’s most effective recruiting video, something that Alabama has profited from for years now. That transcends geography, which used to be the strongest magnet in recruiting.

There are some circumstances at individual institutions that cause this, it here is the fact: at the highest level of recruiting, where half of the 5-star players wind up at less than five percent of Power Five schools, there are no schools from Texas, none from Florida, none from California. The best players from those states leave for greener pastures, or did this year.

Without advocating for an eight-team playoff, one can still sense that the recruiting imbalance is going to play an increasing role in the push to expand — because too many teams today feel shut out.
Not the worst Alabama sports season, but certainly not the best

By: Cecil Hurt

Many years ago, Esquire Magazine’s December issue was devoted to “Dubious Awards of the Year” and the current year — let’s say 1982 — would be proclaimed “The 29th Annual Worst Year Ever!”

In most years, that was a sort of sardonic humor. Occasionally, it was correct. And somewhere in print or online, Esquire may still be doing the feature to cap off the annual ritual of hand-wringing.

In reality, 2019 probably wasn’t the worst year ever in Alabama athletics history. The football team won 10 games, the men’s basketball team narrowly missed the NCAA Tournament in March (which accounted for some of the frustration) and some of the sports where Alabama is perennially good, like golf, were in sudden rebuilding mode. But if you were a Crimson Tide fan, then where — with the shining exception of softball and its great, unexpected No. 3 NCAA finish — was the joy in 2019?

Note: this isn’t a knock at Nick Saban, clearly the greatest coach in college football today. It’s not a criticism of Nate Oats, who played no part in the end of the past basketball season and is implementing a system against what has been the toughest non-conference schedule in the SEC. It’s not ignoring the mountain that Brad Bohannon has to climb in SEC baseball or the challenges inherent in following a legend, which gymnastics coach Dana Duckworth is doing.

But again, with the exception of softball, there has hardly been a magical moment in any of the most carefully watched sports. Basketball did beat Kentucky on January 7 but it was a peculiar game in which Alabama started quickly, nearly gave away a huge lead and has little chance to build on the momentum because of the football drubbing that followed just two days later.

The next biggest basketball win of 2019? A solid road performance at South Carolina probably. The best actual game was probably a loss at Tennessee where the team played over its head on a hostile environment but couldn’t get off a possible game-winning shot in the final seconds.

Football, with different expectations and different circumstances, had what may have been college football’s most unstoppable offense and its most dynamic player, Tua Tagovailoa. But the injury drain started in August and ultimately took away even the aesthetic pleasure of seeing Tua throw to an almost impossibly impressive corps of receivers. So the “best” win? Tennessee, probably. Maybe Texas A&amp;M.

But there were bitter losses to LSU and Auburn. Basketball also went 0-for-4 against the rivals and the salt — or Cajun seasoning — in the wound was that one made the Final Four in basketball and the other is currently involved in the football version.

See Next Page
There are causes for everything, theories about why certain controllable things slipped out of control. There was also an element that seemed unavoidable. The football team that took the field for a distant-seeming first practice on August with a healthy Tua, a healthy Dylan Moses, a healthy LaBryan Ray and so on could have competed with anyone, anywhere. Part of the disappointing aura was that things didn’t work out that way and Alabama came so close to overcoming those things anyway, but couldn’t.

We will know more about 2019 a year from now than we do at the moment. History works that way and shows us what is a pattern and what is simply a part of the ebb and flow. Perhaps things will start to turn around with the Citrus Bowl, or SEC play in basketball, in the early part of 2020. For the moment, though, it’s best to be like Esquire, proclaim 2019 as the worst year ever and hope for no repeat.
Mayden expects UA to, "go out there and play with your heart."

By: Brett Hudson

Senior safety Jared Mayden hadn’t had enough time to fully process the result of the Iron Bowl, minutes after the game ended, when he sent his first message about the bowl game that was to come.

He saw the game as an opportunity for this year’s team to both avoid embarrassment of becoming a three-loss Alabama team and dominate an opponent once again. Now that the University of Alabama has started preparing for the Citrus Bowl against Michigan, that expectation has been set and Mayden expects it to be met.

“If you don’t want to play the game, you probably shouldn’t; if you decide to come and you want to play in a game, go out there and play with your heart. Don’t think about injuries, don’t think about this and that,” Mayden said. “If you go out and play, your main objective should be to dominate Michigan and play your hardest. All that outside, external factors, you know you can’t really pay attention to it. You know what you got to do: we did it all season, you know what you have to do to get ready for the game, so don’t do anything outside of what you know what you need to do.

“What excites me most is it’s another opportunity for this team to play together and still make an identity one last time, to go out there and create an identity for ourselves. That’s what really excites me most. It’s a challenge against a good team, so it’s a good opportunity for this team to show what we can do.”

To date, the only two defections from the team for the bowl game are outside linebacker Terrell Lewis and cornerback Trevon Diggs. The rest of the team has gotten a similar message from UA head coach Nick Saban and strength and conditioning coach Scott Cochran.

“Coach Saban spoke to us yesterday and said you need to be all in for this game. He’s gonna be all in, so if you’re stepping out on that field the players expect you to be all in,” Mayden said. “We’re not going to give you a pass because we’re not playing in a Playoff game, if you’re going out there and messing up in practice, not taking practice seriously. We expect you to go out there and give 100 percent.

“Cochran showed us a video of 2010, the team that played Michigan State, and how they dominated them and he told us those guys took the right approach to get ready for the game. He told us if we want to go out and have a lasting memory of what our team could do and what this season could finish up and be like, the mindset that team has is the same mindset we need to bring toward facing Michigan.”
Early signing starts Wednesday

College football’s new early signing period, now in its third year, begins Wednesday. Almost all of the signing done in the 72-hour period happens on the first day, and a supermajority of prospects sign in the early period.

UA currently has 25 commitments in its 2020 class, most of whom are expected to sign Wednesday. There are also prospects that have yet to commit that could choose UA on Wednesday, or some committed to other schools that could do the same.

Among the notable signees expected for UA on Wednesday are Pickens County defensive lineman Jah-Marien Latham and a five-star quarterback from California, Bryce Young. Latham is signing at the Pickens County High School Auditorium at 9 a.m.

UA is expecting signatures from two more five-stars, according to the 247 Sports Composite: defensive lineman Chris Braswell of Maryland and athlete Ryan Denton of Texas. Alabama is also expected to sign the top linebacker in the state on Wednesday, Demouy Kennedy of Theodore.

TideSports.com has a live blog and another post with capsules on each signee. Saban is scheduled to hold a press conference at 4 p.m.

More notes

Here’s a link to the Tuesday practice report.

The Polynesian Football Hall of Fame named UA quarterback Tua Tagovailoa and Oregon offensive lineman Penei Sewell co-Polynesian College Football Players of the Year. Both received Heisman Trophy votes; Tagovailoa finished 10th with one first-place vote, four second-place votes and 13 third-place votes.

Five UA players were on the Sporting News All-America team, including one first-team choice: Jaylen Waddle as a returner. This post has been updated with where UA stands on the AP, ESPN and Sporting News All-America teams.
Where Alabama finds motivation in rare non-playoff bowl game

By: Michael Casagrande

This classifies as a first-world problem.

Playing a New Year’s Day bowl game against a program like Michigan would be a program builder for a healthy chunk of the college football ecosystem. At Alabama, draws questions about motivation levels.

Coming off five straight playoff appearances, the Citrus Bowl against the Wolverines has been viewed mostly as a sad consolation for a season that could have been. At least that’s what the outside voices said in the wake the program’s first multi-loss regular season since 2010.

And that’s exactly where Alabama strength coach and hype man Scott Cochran wanted to take the team when it resumed practice this week. Cochran played video of a 49-7 whipping Alabama handed Michigan State in the same Orlando bowl game capped a three-loss season and kick started a run of two straight national titles.

“He told us those guys took the right approach to get ready for the game,” Alabama senior safety Jared Mayden said. “He told us if we want to go out and have a lasting memory of what our team could do and what this season could finish up and be like, the mindset that team has is the same mindset we need to bring toward facing Michigan.”

Saban pointed to two other bowl games in his Alabama tenure as an example. While noting energy was solid in Monday’s first practice of bowl season, he referenced the Sugar Bowls following the 2008 and 2013 seasons.

“I can only tell you that the last two times that we’ve been in this situation, whether it was to play Utah or to play Oklahoma, the other team sure had more to prove in the game than we did, and the results certainly showed it,” Saban said, not mentioning that Capital One Bowl win over Michigan State. “So, we need to learn something from those experiences.”

Michigan is 9-3 coming off a 56-27 loss to rival Ohio State its last time out. Preseason playoff chatter quickly ended in Ann Arbor after a 35-14 loss to Wisconsin followed an ugly 24-21 overtime win over Army.

REALTED: The advice Saban gave stars deciding whether to sit out bowl for NFL draft

The Wolverines have never been to the playoff though it’s been in New Year’s Six bowls two of the previous three seasons. They lost both as part of a three-year bowl losing streak. Florida State
won the Orange Bowl in 2016 over the Wolverines in 2016 before Florida took last year’s Peach Bowl, 41-15.

Several players quoted in a Detroit News story about the game show the disappointment in how last year’s 10-win season ended with a sour taste in Atlanta. Wolverines were also fired up at the prospect of facing Alabama, winner of five national titles in the past 10 years. Defensive end Kwity Paye called it “a money game” given Alabama’s recent success.

“They’re a team that you get a win over them, it’s kind of a statement,” linebacker Jordan Glasgow said in the story. “To end our season with a win against them would mean a lot for our program and it would mean a lot for the fans and for the players.”

Alabama is coming off more of a gut-punch rivalry loss in the Iron Bowl. A playoff bid was still on the plate when Auburn won a crazy 48-45 game in Jordan-Hare Stadium. Saban wants that to be a catalyst instead of a depressant when looking at the importance of the Citrus Bowl.

“I think everybody’s really disappointed, and the only way that -- it’s OK to be disappointed,” Saban said. “But I think I believe in the team. I believe in the players. I believe in the leadership on the team. I believe this team has had a lot to overcome, and it continues to grow with what they’ve had to overcome.”

Pride is a factor for players like Mayden, a senior playing his final game in an Alabama uniform.

“That’s still a Michigan team, you can go out there get embarrassed, and you don’t want people saying that you got embarrassed in the Citrus Bowl,” Mayden said. “You want to say it’s another game, you need to take that game seriously. That’s what I plan on doing: I’ll go out there and take the game seriously. I’m still doing my preparation, so it shouldn’t be hard for other guys. If it’s hard to get into the game, you probably shouldn’t play, at the end of the day.”

Linebacker Terrell Lewis and cornerback Trevon Diggs opted to focus on the NFL draft instead of playing the Citrus Bowl. For everyone else, this is just as serious as any other time that chin strap snaps.

“We’re not going to give you a pass because we’re not playing in a Playoff game,” Mayden said. “If you’re going out there and messing up in practice, not taking practice seriously. We expect you to go out there and give 100 percent.”
Havoc on the way to UA’s defense

By: Brett Hudson

Nick Saban isn’t a big fan of sacks as a reliable statistic, but in this case, they illustrate well the problem he was trying to fix.

When his University of Alabama defenses were dominant just a few years ago, finishing second in the nation in yards per play allowed in 2015 and first in 2016, they were racking up sacks. They averaged 3.47 and 3.6 sacks per game, respectively, ranking third nationally both years. In 2019, UA’s sacks dropped down to 2.42 per game, ranked tied for 45th in the nation, and the UA defense tumbled down to 17th in yards per play allowed, 29th when only considering games against Power 5 competition.

There are other factors and more nuance, but the correlation is still somewhat strong. In response, UA’s 2019 recruiting class is loaded with pass rushers.

Alabama brought in 22 signees on Wednesday, the first day of the early signing period for the class of 2020, and that group included some of the best perimeter front defenders in the nation: Chris Braswell, a five-star defensive end from Baltimore; Quandarrius Robinson, a four-star outside linebacker from Birmingham; and William Anderson Jr., a four-star defensive end from Hampton, Georgia. Drew Sanders, a five-star athlete from Denton, Texas, could also end up in a role that includes an emphasis on pass rushing.

“I definitely think that we really like that group of guys,” Saban said. “They’re all very talented. They’re all good pass rushers. They’re all long.”

The emphasis there is more than just a combination of abundant talent and a need for their skills. UA’s roster attrition requires UA to go heavy on the edge of the box.

UA is going to lose senior outside linebacker Anfernee Jennings after the Citrus Bowl and has already lost junior outside linebacker Terrell Lewis, who has elected to skip the game to begin his preparation for the 2020 NFL Draft. It comes a year after the defense lost Isaiah Buggs and Christian Miller.

UA has also been forced into this personnel need in atypical methods of attrition, in five-star prospect Eyabi Anoma leaving the program before starting a game and five-star Antonio Alfano leaving the program before appearing in a game.

Tom Luginbill, a recruiting analyst for ESPN, was not surprised to see UA attack those positions with heavy numbers.

“What you see where Alabama sits right now, and it’s similar to what Clemson has going on, they continue to corner the market on the positions that they’ve got to have to improve their

See Next Page
areas of deficiency,” Luginbill said in a teleconference earlier this week. “Now, what are they? Well, maybe they haven’t been the pass rush team that they would like to be or maybe that they were when Ryan Anderson and Tim Williams were playing off the edge. So what do they do? They go out and target a Chris Braswell or target a William Anderson. Even some of the outside linebackers in this class, Demouy Kennedy and Quandarrius Robinson. Both guys, particularly Robinson, are guys that are likely going to grow into being a pass-rush type player. Robinson is 6’5”, 215.

“I think the focus of Alabama, when you look at this class, a couple of things. Have to address on the offensive side of the ball projected losses early to the NFL. You have to prepare in advance of that. I think they’ve done it at quarterback, they’ve done it at wideout. And where do they need to improve on the defensive side of the ball? It’s on the edges on the outside to create pass rush. I think that’s what stands out about this class.”

Saban also mentioned defensive lineman Tim Smith as someone who could see some time outside. At 6’4”, 325 pounds, he’s not the typical outside player, but Saban said Smith moves well for his size and is a basketball player, so Saban sees the quickness to be on the perimeter if needed. UA had to hold off a late push from Florida to keep Smith steady in his UA commitment.

As for the personnel management aspect of the positions, Saban did not disagree.

“Well I think that defensive players, we wanted to get a couple more guys up front. I think we did,” Saban said. “We’re still trying to add to that in the future. Edge players, which we just talked about.”