May 2, 2013

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PACT solution not perfect, but fairest possible

It's not a perfect solution. A lot of people who played by the rules and did nothing wrong are going to wind up in the "victim of circumstances file" and won't receive everything they were promised.

However, we think the Alabama Supreme Court's decision last week that closed a legal battle over the state's Prepaid Affordable College Tuition plan was the fairest solution possible.

PACT allowed Alabama families to pay in a fixed amount when their children were young, and when those children graduated from high school, they would receive full tuition for four years at a state university.

The program worked as advertised for two decades. Then came the stock market crash of 2008 (PACT was heavily invested on Wall Street and counted on the returns for funding), and huge increases in college tuition costs (an average of 5.6 percent a year from 2002 to 2012, according to the U.S. Department of Education).

That left PACT short of money to cover its future obligations.

Program officials and some of the participants agreed to a settlement to pay tuition based on fall 2010 rates, with parents making up the difference, but some holdouts who were determined to get everything they were promised refused to take part and went to court.

The Supreme Court last year ruled in their favor, that state law as it existed didn't permit the reduced payments. A month later, the Legislature amended the law to make those reduced payments. That bill is the one the Supreme Court affirmed last week, after it was reviewed by Montgomery County Circuit Judge Johnny Hardwick, who approved the original settlement.

PACT has been paying out at current tuition rates. The reductions will take effect this summer.

State Treasurer Young Boozer said the ruling "provides benefits for all contract holders, preserves substantial value and protects the program with a long-term financial plan."

It ensures the more than 33,000 Alabamians who participate in PACT will get something for their children, rather than the program imploding. We sympathize with those who will have to find some way to make up the difference on tuition payments. We have advocated that the state honor the program's commitment to its participants. It seems as if too many people wanted to pretend that no promise was made to the families that participated in PACT.

We sympathize with those who think a contract is a contract, and feel abused by the system and the way this has turned out. We just don't see a better alternative, given the economic realities in Alabama in 2013. Nothing is coming out of Montgomery to "fix PACT," if that's defined as returning the program to what it was.

This gets the most money to the most people. It's time to accept that and move on.
Education landscape changing in state

New dynamic: GOP dictating changes, AEA's power wanes

By Bill Barrow
The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY | Self-declared education reformers have had considerable success across the country over the past few decades, from charter school expansion and private school tuition vouchers to new limits on teachers' job protections. But perhaps nowhere have the triumphs marked a bigger political upheaval than in Alabama, where the new Republican supermajority is dominating the state teachers' organization that was long the epicenter of power.

Alabama Education Association chief Henry Mabry accuses Republicans of hurting public schools with changes to teacher tenure, tax breaks for private school tuition, and limits on AEA collecting dues through the state payroll system.

"There seems to be an unspoken agenda to change the public education system to where it's not even recognizable," Mabry said. He called it "right out of the playbook" of a national movement to eviscerate government in favor of private and for-profit enterprises.

GOP leaders frame their efforts as improving a broken system more concerned with public employees than with children.

"It's not that we're punitive toward AEA," House Speaker Mike Hubbard said. "We're just doing the right thing by the taxpayers, and they don't like that."

Alabama's statehouse dynamic has turned on its head since Republicans won legislative supermajorities in 2010, giving them legislative control for the first time since Reconstruction. Soon after, longtime AEA leader Paul Hubbert, who spent more than four decades amassing a reputation as the state's most powerful lobbyist, retired and gave way to Mabry.

"For so long, AEA controlled everything, and they don't anymore," Hubbard said. "They're having a bad time now."

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EDUCATION
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really hard time adjusting to that."

Hubbert, who still lives in Montgomery, said AEA was a predictable target for Republicans because it "had primarily supported Democrats."

The Alabama legislative battles haven't produced the kind of protests seen in Wisconsin after Republican Gov. Scott Walker gutted his state's public unions, but they underscore how quickly public policy can turn after watershed elections. They've also had considerable political ripple effects. The state Democratic Party, once dependent on AEA's organizational muscle, is reeling. Republicans must deal with the realities of a supermajority: Old two-party battles are sometimes reprises as internal party struggles. Both sides say those issues will figure prominently in the 2014 elections.

Immediately, the new GOP Legislature tried to block AEA from collecting money from its 100,000 or so members through the automatic deductions in the state payroll system. The law remains tied up in court, but it would change how AEA collects money, potentially cutting into the estimated $7 million to $8 million that Mabry says it spends each election cycle.

Republicans made it easier to fire teachers and blocked them from being paid during appeals. The party also wants the state to provide liability insurance for teachers — a key benefit teachers get from AEA. The state already provides similar insurance for non-education employees.

The biggest GOP victory came earlier this year when legislators passed the Alabama Accountability Act with provisions championed by school-choice advocates, including a private-school tuition voucher program for students from low-income households and tax breaks for private school tuition paid by families zoned for poorly performing public schools.

Those ideas have been implemented elsewhere. The tuition scholarship-voucher fund is modeled after a program Jeb Bush enacted as governor of Florida. Other provisions closely track model legislation offered by the American Legislative Exchange Council, a consortium of conservative state legislators backed mostly by corporate contributions.

Mabry calls the tuition grants and tax breaks "once-in-a-lifetime goodies" for private schools and many parents who already send their children to them. Republicans estimate that the tax credits will divert about $50 million from public school appropriations, but AEA says the number will be much higher. Mabry blasts Hubbert's argument that supporting public schools is different from backing public school employees.

Hubbard spent more than a decade in the minority protesting Hubbert's influence. Hubbard and Senate GOP leader Del Marsh refer to AEA as "the union," though AEA doesn't have collective bargaining rights and cannot strike. Statehouse lore holds that Hubbert could sit in the gallery and determine the outcome of budget amendments by showing lawmakers a thumbs-up or thumbs-down — though Hubbert disputes the account.

AEA was an unquestioned success in an otherwise unfriendly state for organized labor. National teachers' union officials recognize it as among the most influential state associations without collective bargaining power. Unlike several other Southern states that have multiple groups, AEA is the product of an integration-era
merger of a white group and black group. Hubbert ran AEA for decades with Joe Reed, who is black, as his top deputy.

The men were longtime executives of the state Democratic Party. Hubbert won the Democratic nomination for governor in 1990 but lost the general election. AEA usually took the lead on recruiting candidates, often choosing education employees and administrators. Republicans lambasted the “double dipping” because the officeholders got two state paychecks, and some AEA-backed Democrats were convicted of fraud after a federal investigation found they got paychecks and contracts from state two-year colleges without doing the work.

An enduring example of AEA’s old power is the fact that Alabama passes two budgets annually: one for education and the General Fund budget for everything else. Earmarks direct the overwhelming majority of state tax revenues to the education budget. In a state where anti-tax sentiment has always been strong, AEA saw to it that public schools — and their employees — got most of the pie.

Hubbert and Mabry say that’s the way the electorate wants it. They attribute Republicans’ 2010 sweep to a national election centered on President Barack Obama and the economy, not on GOP education policy.

AEA has begun recruiting candidates for 2014 on both sides of the aisle, Mabry said. New district lines give Republicans a decided advantage, particularly in the few remaining districts represented by white Democrats. Mabry argued that Republican voters are sympathetic to AEA’s positions, particularly on vouchers and tax credits. He noted that some Republicans in Indiana and Ohio were ousted in 2012 after a similar approach.

Hubbard and Marsh said they can win the “school choice” argument on merit. Hubbard’s old nemesis, meanwhile, gives him reason not to worry anytime soon. The bottom line, according to Hubbert, is that AEA’s philosophy and Republican priorities don’t match. “AEA will change with the times, I’m sure,” Hubbert said. “But will it be a major player inside the Republican Party? I doubt it.”
Work proceeds as dignitaries break ground at Mercedes

Site work is completed during a groundbreaking ceremony for the Mercedes-Benz U.S. International Logistics Hub in Vance on Wednesday. The $70 million facility is scheduled to open in 2014.

By Patrick Rupinski, Business Editor

The belated groundbreaking was for Mercedes-Benz U.S. International’s logistics center. Construction on the center began weeks ago. The $75 million facility will be a 900,000-square-foot, climate-controlled, high-technology warehouse where thousands of parts and components will be sorted and sequenced as needed for the Mercedes vehicles assembled at Vance.

“We customize every car we make,” said Markus Schaefer, president and CEO of Mercedes-Benz U.S. International.

That means vehicles moving along the Mercedes assembly lines will have different components, so it is important for the right set of parts to get to the right vehicle, he said.

Construction of the logistics center had to begin earlier because the facility must be finished, fully equipped and operating by the end of the year to accommodate the start...
of the year to accommodate the start of C-Class sedan production. The sedans are being added to the MBUSI line-up, with the first American-made C-Class going to dealers next year.

The logistics center, which is as large as MBUSI's original assembly plant, also will handle the sequencing of parts for the M-Class and GL-Class sport utility vehicles and R-Class crossover vehicles now made at Vance, and for an all-new fifth vehicle — a still unnamed SUV that Mercedes plans to add to MBUSI production in 2015.

Schaefer said the logistics center will have about 240 truck deliveries and handle at least 20,000 bins containing about 2.9 million parts each day.

The center will have about 600 employees, which will include Mercedes employees and private contractors and service providers.

Those jobs caught the attention of Bentley. "Six hundred jobs is tremendous for this area," he said, noting the families of the 600 workers will have a better life.

"Twenty years ago when Mercedes-Benz decided to come to Tuscaloosa, we didn't know the impact it would have on Alabama," he said.

Since then the plant has expanded several times and has become one of the state's largest private employers. Mercedes also has attracted dozens of automotive suppliers to the state and paved the way for Honda and Hyundai to open auto plants in Alabama. Mercedes showed what Alabama workers can do, Bentley said.

"Because of Mercedes, we were able to recruit other great international companies to Alabama — companies like Airbus," which announced plans last year to build a major plane manufacturing facility in Mobile.

The magnitude of the logistics center and the tight deadline for its completion was not lost on Bill Harbert, CEO of B.L. Harbert Construction, the Birmingham company handling the construction.

"This is one of the most exciting jobs we have ever been part of," said Harbert whose company is listed among the country's top 100 construction companies.

"The sheer size and the time schedule we are on makes this a very challenging project," he said.

On Friday, his crews poured 62,000 square feet of cement and on Monday, they poured another 62,000 square feet. That was the most cement the company ever poured in a single day, Harbert said.

After the groundbreaking, Bentley met with reporters and said he wants the Legislature to act on several items before it adjourns on May 20.

Most important is passing budgets for the next fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1, he said.

He said he also is interested in bills to build a convention center at Gulf State Park in Gulf Shores and to revamp the state's Medicaid program, which helps pay for health care for low-income individuals and families.

Bentley also said he has not decided if he will make a permanent appointment for Tuscaloosa County sheriff. The governor appointed Billy Sharp as sheriff after longtime sheriff Ted Sexton resigned earlier this year.

At the time, Bentley said the appointment was interim. The governor said he is still talking to people about the sheriff position, but then added: "Billy Sharp is doing a great job."

Bentley said the sheriff's term ends in 18 months and the primary election for sheriff is about a year away. Sharp has indicated he does not plan to run in next year's election.

"There are a number of candidates likely to run," he said, noting being appointed to the job so close to the election might be an advantage or a disadvantage to a candidate.
Ala. business leaders see growing optimism

By Patrick Rupinski
Business Editor

State business leaders have become slightly more optimistic about the economy than they were at the start of the year, according to University of Alabama researchers.

Researchers Sam Addy and Amad Ijaz of UA's Center for Business and Economic Research have updated their 2013 economic forecast released in January after surveying the business leaders again in March. They used that survey and other economic data to predict where the state economy will be for the rest of the year.

"The most noticeable change is people are slightly more optimistic than they were in the fourth quarter (of 2012)," Ijaz said. "But we still see a struggling economy."

The new forecast indicates the state's economy will grow 1.5 to 2 percent this year, but that is not enough to return the employment picture to its pre-recession level, he said.

"It should be at 3 to 3.5 percent growth rate" to deliver healthy, sustained employment, he said.

Although the forecast concentrates on the state as a whole, Ijaz said the Tuscaloosa area is a bright spot in Alabama and continues to perform better than the rest of the state.

Tuscaloosa is helped by the automotive industry, which is seeing strong demand for new vehicles nationally, he said. Tuscaloosa County is home to Mercedes-Benz U.S. International and a host of automotive suppliers.

Auto sales nationally remain strong, buoyed by low interest rates, good incentives from dealers and pent-up demand from consumers who put off replacing their vehicles during the recession, he said.

The local economy also is helped by the many building projects underway, including rebuilding in areas devastated by the April 27, 2011, tornado, he said.

But Ijaz said business leaders — the people who hire and expand their businesses — remain very cautious about what is ahead. Many are unsure how the new Affordable Care Act will affect their businesses including the provision to require employers with more than 50 employees to provide employees health insurance.

That could be keeping some businesses from expanding their workforce, he said.

The recent slowdown of the Chinese economy and the continuing problems with Europe's economy, which Ijaz said was close to being at the depression level, are also causing concern for state businesses.

On the plus side, state businesses started to increase their inventories during the first quarter. That was in response to the depleted inventories seen at the end of 2012, but Ijaz said he expects inventory growth will slow in the next quarter.
Birmingham business leaders OK with Blueprint progress

BY YANN RANAIVO | STAFF

Several top business leaders in Birmingham continue to praise a strategic growth plan developed three years ago to help shape the region's economy.

Birmingham Business Alliance officials released the latest data last week to support Blueprint Birmingham, a multi-year strategic outline that was drafted in 2010 to guide the region toward growth in specific sectors to move Birmingham forward.

Data revealed at the Blueprint Birmingham Summit last week were strong, showing triple the growth in new jobs to the area and four times the amount of capital invested over the previous year.

"It's not just a marketing strategy," BBA CEO Brian Hilson told the crowd of about 300. "It's also an opportunity for us to better what we market."

BBA board chairman Fred McCallum, who is AT&T Alabama president, said the plan was needed to develop a path for the area to boost economic development.

"Employment has gone up and capital investment is really extraordinary," McCallum said. "We're very happy with what happened last year. Blueprint has always been about creating (a path) to greater economic development."

During the annual summit, the alliance revealed data showing 71 new and expanding companies announced 3,831 new jobs in 2012, up from 1,481 in 2011 and the annual average of 1,875 between 2001 and 2010. Those companies attracted $843 million in capital investments, about four times the amount invested the previous year.

Other, more detailed economic data about the region, similar to that released in the 2012 report, was not given at the summit but was expected to be made available this week, according to BBA officials.

In selected data used in the 2013 report, Birmingham ranked second lowest for cost of living in comparison with 11 other cities in the South, according to the Council for Community and Economic Research.

Birmingham's 2012 cost-of-living average was 88.5 percent of the U.S. average.

Other report highlights included the nearly $2 million in awards from the Alabama Innovation Fund to three research
'WE'RE VERY HAPPY
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greater economic
development.'

Fred McCallum
Chairman
Birmingham Business Alliance

initiatives and the launch of five technology
startups at the University of Alabama at
Birmingham.

Susan Matlock, CEO of the Innovation
Depot, a business incubator with a roster
mostly populated by tech firms, described
the Blueprint as the "best strategic plan this
region's ever seen."

"It's exciting to have a plan that focuses
on entrepreneurship and technology," she
said, adding the plan keeps the region on a
growth path.

David Sher, co-CEO of AmSher Receivables
Management, said he was part of the group
that implemented the Blueprint. He said
they visited other Southern cities, most
notably Austin, Texas, to give Birmingham
some models.

Sher said one of the Blueprint's strong
points is that it's prompted the corporate
community to come together to improve
the regional economy.

"It appears that we're making progress
every day in all the areas," he said. "You
have a strong commitment from the big
corporate community."

Uday Bhat, CEO of Bhat Geosciences,
said the Birmingham region is making
progress but still has work to do.

"But it's the first time people have come
together for a common purpose," he said.
"Hopefully, it helps the regional commu-
nity."

University of Alabama at Birmingham
President Ray Watts noted the launch of the
tech startups, which he said was part
of an initiative with the BBA to speed up
the technology transfer process, yielding of
new startups, jobs and revenues.

"This strong partnership with the BBA...
is vital to ensuring that the Birmingham
region and Alabama thrive in the global
knowledge economy."

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IN THE LEGISLATURE ▶ MEDICAID

Senate approves overhaul of program

Kim Chandler
kchandle@al.com

The Alabama Senate last week approved an overhaul of Alabama's Medicaid program.

The bill, similar to one already passed by the House, would revamp the way the state delivers services in the healthcare program for the poor, changing from a fee-for-service model to a network of managed care organizations.

The bill divides the state into regions and creates a network of regional managed care organizations.

The state will pay the organizations a fixed amount of money, and the organizations will pay providers and manage patient care.

"Patients are going to receive, in my opinion, better care, and you get more definition in being able to manage what are the requirements for the state of Alabama fiscally," Senate sponsor Greg Reed, R-Jasper, said.

State Health Officer Don Williamson has said the organizations will have financial incentives to correctly manage patient care to decrease expensive emergency room visits and other costs.

The organizations will be community run, but also will have the option of contracting with managed care companies.

The organizations are to be operational by 2016.

Alabama Arise, an advocacy group for low-income families, supports the change.

"We think the bill will produce both cost savings and improved health outcomes," Arise communications director Jim Carnes said.

Reed said Medicaid in recent years has grown to consume one in three General Fund dollars in the state.

Williamson said estimates are that the change will save the state between $50 million and $70 million annually over what Medicaid would otherwise cost.
UA acts to honor slain librarian
Kate Ragsdale to be remembered with scholarship

TUSCALOOSA | The University of Alabama announced Tuesday the establishment of an endowed scholarship to honor the late Kate Ragsdale, a longtime former employee.
"Kate was a valued alumna and dear friend of the school," said Heidi Julien, the director of UA's School of Library and Information Studies, in a news release. "Her dedication to the field of academic librarianship was unmatched, and her leadership and volunteerism will be remembered and honored through this scholarship."

Ragsdale, 73, was found dead in February at her home in The Highlands subdivision. Police classified her death as a homicide, and the case remains unsolved.

Ragsdale retired in 2006 as planning officer for the University Libraries at UA. She was awarded the Library Leadership Board Faculty Award in 2004.

She continued her professional service as a volunteer with the Friends of the Library Bookstore of the Tuscaloosa Public Library after her retirement.

Ragsdale was a member of boards, councils and committees for several organizations, including the American Library Association, the Association of College and Research Libraries, the Library Administration and Management Association,
HONOR

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-Special Libraries Association, Southeastern Library Association, and the Alabama Library Association, serving as an officer when called.

In 1963, Ragsdale earned a bachelor's degree from Sweet Briar College in Virginia.

She earned a master of library science degree in 1986 from the School of Library and Information Studies at UA.

She received the Library School Association Distinguished Alumni Award in 2012.

Once endowed, the Kate Webb Ragsdale Endowed Scholarship will be awarded to students at the School of Library and Information Studies. Preference will be given to students who wish to pursue a career in academic libraries.

Online contributions for the scholarship may be made on the UA Advancement website. Contributions can also be mailed to the University of Alabama College of Communication and Information Sciences, Attn: Neely Portera, Box 870172, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487.
UA Greek community awards $100,000 in grants to agencies

Special to The Tuscaloosa News

TUSCALOOSA

The University of Alabama Greek community awarded its annual Greek Week grants as part of the Profiles in Service and Leadership Banquet on April 16.

The grants, which total $100,000, will be given to some 30 nonprofit organizations operating in and around Tuscaloosa. Recipient organizations are selected after a grant request application process.

"The primary goal of Greek Week 2013 is to unite the four Greek councils and to give back to the community," said Hannah McBrayer, Alabama Panhellenic Association vice president of administration.

Greek Week activities, which included nightly tournaments of bowling, basketball and dodge ball, took place on campus in March. The week concluded with a song and dance competition. Ticket sales for the events fund the yearly grants.

Greek Week student participants are responsible for completing service hours with Habitat for Humanity. This year, they helped build an Alberta house that had been damaged in the April 2011 tornado.

With more than 4,500 members, the Alabama Panhellenic Association is the largest women's organization on campus.

Greek Week grant recipients are the Boy Scouts of America's Black Warrior Council, Bama Hockey, Books for the Black Belt, Read BAMA Read, Best Buddies, Crossing Points, Tuscaloosa's One Place, the Tuscaloosa Children's Center, READ Alabama, Gamma Phi Beta, Child Abuse Prevention Services, Tuscaloosa County Park and Recreation Authority, Black Warrior Riverkeeper, Arts 'n Autism, YMCA of Tuscaloosa County, 100 Black Men of West Alabama, Alabama REACH, Impact Alabama, American Red Cross, Campus Veterans Association, the Rise School, American Cancer Society Relay for Life, March of Dimes, Clay House Children's Center, Easter Seals West Alabama, Hospice of West Alabama, Greek Fest, National Pan-Hellenic Council, Full Life Ahead Foundation of HOPE and Brewer-Porch Children's Center.
UA, Stillman to hold graduations

Tom Joyner, morning radio talk show host, will speak at Stillman's commencement

Staff report

TUSCALOOSA | The University of Alabama will award more than 4,000 degrees this weekend, and Stillman College will welcome a nationally known radio host on May 11 as both schools hold graduation exercises.

Morning radio talk show host Tom Joyner will be the speaker at Stillman's 137th commencement ceremony at 9 a.m. May 11 on the campus' Sheppard Lawn.

In addition to his radio show, Joyner is the founder and chairman of Reach Media Inc. His charitable foundation has raised more than $60 million to help keep students in historically black colleges and universities.

The Tuskegee University graduate began his broadcasting career in Montgomery.

At UA, four graduation ceremonies will be held: 6 p.m. Friday and 9 a.m., 1:30 p.m. and 5 p.m. Saturday at Coleman Coliseum.

The College of Commerce and Business Administration and College of Engineering will award degrees Friday. The Capstone College of Nursing, College of Communication and Information Sciences, College of Education and the College of Human Environmental Sciences will hold commencement exercises at 9 a.m. Saturday, while the School of Social Work and College of Arts and Sciences will award degrees at 1:30 p.m. The law school will award degrees at 5 p.m.

Doctoral recipients, education specialists and master's degree candidates participate with their respective schools.

The commencement ceremonies will be broadcast live on the Internet. The webcast will be archived on UA's website, www.ua.edu/commencement, and will be available for viewing throughout May.
Men’s team heads to L.A.

By Tommy Deas
Executive Sports Editor

The University of Alabama women's tennis team is staying home. The Crimson Tide men’s tennis coach is going home.

Both hope their paths end in Urbana, III., where the top 16 men’s and women’s teams will advance to play for national titles in the NCAA Championships.

The UA women landed the No. 9 overall seed and will host Northwestern State, Florida State and Memphis in regional competition May 10-11. Alabama will play Northwestern State in the Friday opener at 1 p.m., followed by Florida State vs. Memphis at 4 p.m. The winners will play at 1 p.m. Saturday, with the winner of the regional advancing to Urbana. Tickets are priced at $5 for general admission and $3 for UA students.

Alabama hosted a regional for the first time last year but lost in the final and failed to advance.

“I felt like last year we were prepared and this year we are even more prepared,” said Tom Foehe, a senior from Germany. “We got to experience what it’s like to be a top-10 team and even a top-five team at one point. We know we can beat any team.”

UA coach Jenny Mainz believes last year’s finish will help this time around.

“I would use the word devastating. Yes, last year provides us with motivation,” Mainz said. “We have encountered some tough situations this year. We’ve consistently faced tough teams bringing their best.

“Northwestern State, I know they are a good program, same thing for Florida State and Memphis, but we’re playing the ball. We’re playing for Alabama.”

The UA women are battle-tested after winning seven 4-3 matches this season.

“In the top 16, the only teams we haven’t faced are West Coast teams for the most part,” Mainz said. “We have a chance to do something very special, and we’re excited about that opportunity. I think we have a lot to prove. We have worked for this opportunity.”

Foehe said she and her teammates respect the field at the regional but won’t be intimidated.

“Everybody is a good team at this point,” she said, “but nothing to be scared of.”

First-year Alabama men’s coach George Husack came to UA from Southern California, where he was an assistant on teams that won three straight national championships. Alabama will play San Diego in a first-round match in Los Angeles, with the winner facing the winner of the match between Sacramento State and fourth-seeded and four-time defending champion USC.

“Just playing in the NCAA tournament, it’s a chance to improve our record and our reputation,” said Husack, a native of San Mateo, Calif. “I don’t know how many expected us, but we’re taking it one step at a time and focused on the training.

“Teams take on the personal chemistry of their coach, and I’m loose. It’s an exciting time and I’ll be amongst friends.”

Alabama finished strong, defeating Arkansas and Ole Miss in the Southeastern Conference tournament. Jared Botha, a senior from South Africa who was on a UA team that played in the NCAA Tournament.

The University of Alabama women's tennis team begins to react as Alabama appears on the screen as a regional tournament host school and the No. 9 overall seed.
Members of the University of Alabama men's tennis team applaud after learning their postseason destination on Tuesday.

PHOTO | KENT GIDLEY, CRIMSONTIDEPHOTOS.COM

HOSTING

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the NCAA tournament two years ago, believes this team has more momentum.

"It does feel different," he said. "I feel like we're going into it a lot more optimistic. As of now it doesn't matter who we play. We ended the season on a great high with all the momentum. I think it's going to carry over to the rest of the season. Everybody is feeling really confident right now."

Reach Tommy Deas at tommy@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0224.
Tide's McCarron is trading pigskins
for a pace car at Talladega

By Chase Goodbread
Sports Writer

TUSCALOOSA | University of Alabama quarterback AJ McCarron will get about as close to the Aaron's 499 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series race as anyone can without actually competing.

McCarron, an avid racing fan, will be an honorary pace car driver for the race at Talladega Superspeedway this weekend.

The fifth-year senior will lead the field of 43 cars on a ceremonial lap in a Ford Mustang GT. The official pace car, a different vehicle, will handle the final lap before the green flag and all caution laps.

"He'll get behind the wheel and go up on the bank and lead the field at a slower pace to get the race started," Talladega Superspeedway director of public relations Russell Brantham said. "One lap before they get ready to go green, he'll peel off and drive back to the garage area."

Branham said pace cars typically take their laps at speeds of 75-90 mph.

"We talked about it. When I rode in the pace car they only went 55, and he told me he was driving," UA coach Nick Saban joked. "I said, 'Look, you need..."
to let someone else drive and go 55." McCarron, "I have enjoyed races at Talladega before and have always had a passion to get up to speed on the track. This is an incredible opportunity, and to be able to do it in front of the most famous drivers in the world is something I am really looking forward to."

McCarron has led Alabama to back-to-back BCS national championships and enjoyed his best season last year with 30 touchdown passes and only three interceptions. With Tuscaloosa and McCarron’s hometown of Mobile as close as they are to Talladega, the Crimson Tide’s record-breaking quarterback was an ideal choice to drive the pace car.

**NASCAR**

**Aaron’s 499 Sprint Cup race**
- **When:** Sunday at noon
- **Where:** Talladega Superspeedway
- **TV:** FOX

Have you ever attended a race at Talladega? To vote in our Web poll, visit tuscaloosanews.com

"AJ has had such amazing success at Alabama, and that is known all over the country," speedway Chairman Grant Lynch said. "We know the drivers and fans are going to be excited to have him here for the Aaron’s 499. I’m sure as soon as the crowd sees him in our Ford Mustang GT pace car, there’s going to be a lot of noise made."

UA coach Nick Saban served as the Aaron’s 499 grand marshal in 2009.

On April 20, before the A-Day Game in Tuscaloosa, McCarron and his teammates were on hand for the unveiling of a special Alabama national championship paint scheme on Michael Waltrip’s No. 55 car, which will compete in Sunday’s race.

Tickets for Sunday’s race can be purchased at www.talladegasuperspeedway.com.

*Reach Chase Goodbread at chase@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0196.*
UAB investing team tops with threepeat

Bests Harvard, Stanford and others for title

Alex Walsh
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For the third year in a row, Birmingham is home to some of the smartest and most successful investors in the world among undergraduate students.

The University of Alabama at Birmingham's Green and Gold Fund, a student-led financial fund managed by 30 undergraduates, took top prize for the third consecutive year in the Redefining Investment Strategy Education (RISIE) international competition this year, in the Alternatives category.

Across all categories, RISIE attracted more than 120 universities to the competition, including Stanford, Harvard and Carnegie Mellon.

The competition used fund values at the beginning and end of 2012 to determine winners. The Green and Gold Fund began the year at a value of $483,091.19, said chief investment officer Elizabeth Case, and grew more than 14 percent to end the year at $552,866.52.

The fund has grown so much, in fact — up from $340,000 in 2006 — that the students are preparing to pay out stipends to themselves, as was written into the fund’s investment directive when it was created.

The fund will pay out

KEY MOVES

The following decisions paid off big for UAB's student-run Green and Gold Fund:

- The students bought shares of United Parcel Service stock on Sept. 23, 2011, citing weakness in the business performance of the U.S. Postal Service. Since then, shares are up more than 25 percent.
- The fund managers saw an opportunity in the health care industry and bought ABT stock. Since September 2011, shares are up 40 percent, and the stock has paid quarterly dividends.

See UAB, Page 3C
scholarships in each year that the value exceeds $500,000, said Case.

The Green and Gold Fund is managed by a group of 30 undergraduate students, broken up into three sets of participants: five executive members, eight portfolio managers and 17 industry analysts.

Each portfolio manager specializes in an industry and recommends investment positions to the larger group.

Before a decision is made, the manager will develop and deliver an investor presentation — think PowerPoint slides — often with the help of an analyst or two.

From there, all eight managers, plus the executive members, will vote on each proposal. The fund invests about $10,000 in each of its positions, although that changes as prices rise and fall, Case said.

The fund is invested in a mix of securities. At last check, it had 54 percent of its value invested in equities, 23 percent in fixed-income products, 15 percent in cash, and 8 percent in exchange-traded funds, which are investment vehicles designed to closely track a market or broad investment sector.

The fund normally wouldn't be so heavily invested in cash, Case said, but is structured that way now in preparation for the stipend payments.
Study: Mediterranean diet helps memory, thinking

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Do you remember what you had for dinner last night?
You might have a better shot at that if your meal contained foods associated with the Mediterranean diet.
That's according to a University of Alabama at Birmingham study published in Tuesday's issue of Neurology, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology.
The study, looking at the diets and cognitive abilities of more than 17,000 people, is being called the largest yet done on the Mediterranean diet, UAB says.
The study did find, however, that the diet was not associated with a lower risk of memory and thinking problems in people with diabetes.
"Our results suggest that the Mediterranean diet might support cognitive abilities by protecting against cerebrovascular disease and stroke," said Dr. Virginia Wadley, senior author of the paper. "For people with diabetes, risk for cognitive impairment may be linked to
other factors as well, including episodes of low and fluctuating blood sugar. Also, in our study people with diabetes were less likely to follow a Mediterranean diet, as it differs from the recommended diet for diabetes control.

The data for this study came from the database of UAB's ongoing Reasons for Geographic and Racial Differences in Stroke (REGARDS). The study enrolled more than 30,000 people nationwide from 2003 to 2007 and continues to monitor them for health changes.

It recently generated a study challenging the popular notion that the South had the nation’s most obese people.

For this study, the diets of 17,478 people whose average age was 64 was reviewed and over four years, they were given tests measuring their memory and thinking skills. Diabetics made up 17 percent of the study group.

There was not found to be a significant difference between African-Americans and whites in terms of mental declines.

Wadley is an associate professor in the Division of Gerontology, Geriatrics and Palliative Care in the UAB Department of Medicine.

Dr. Georgios Tsivgoulis, a neurologist with UAB and the University of Athens, Greece, is the lead author of the study.

Tsivgoulis could not be reached immediately for comment as he was in Greece Monday, presumably getting a healthy dose of omega-3 fatty acids.

However, UAB did pass along from him this statement: "Diet is an important modifiable activity that could help in preserving cognitive functioning in late life," he said.

"However, it is only one of several important lifestyle activities that might play a role in late-life mental functioning. Exercise, avoiding obesity, not smoking cigarettes and taking medications for conditions like diabetes and hypertension are also important."

The study was supported by the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, one of the National Institutes of Health, and the Department of Health and Human Services.
1917 Clinic marks quarter century

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The legacy of the 1917 Clinic treating AIDS patients for 25 years were celebrated Friday and Saturday with several events.

The University of Alabama at Birmingham clinic opened Jan. 28, 1988, not long after the first cases of AIDS were beginning to appear across the United States.

"Around the mid-1980s, more and more patients with AIDS-related illnesses were being referred to UAB from across state," said Dr. Michael Saag, UAB professor of medicine and director of the UAB Center for AIDS Research. "They couldn't get the treatment elsewhere."

Saag remembered that shortly after it opened they launched the azidothymidine (AZT) study enrolling more than 70 patients. Of 27 antiretroviral drugs now approved for AIDS, seven were tested in clinical trials at 1917 Clinic.

Current 1917 Clinic director James Raper joined the staff in the mid '90s.

Events marking the 25th anniversary included a scientific symposium Friday at UAB Cudworth Hall Auditorium.

On Saturday, there was a memorial service from 1 to 2 p.m. at the Baptist Church of the Covenant, 2117 University Boulevard.

A "Walk in Remembrance" to the 1917 Clinic was held after the memorial.

"The memorial and walk is a moment to realize how far we've come, but also a chance to recognize those people who lost their lives to the disease," Raper said. "I think of the patients that are no longer with us, and it provides resolve for continued dedication."
UAB'S GROWTH CONTINUES ON SOUTHSIDE

The basics
With a growing student population, the University of Alabama at Birmingham campus continues to expand on the city's Southside. In 2012, millions of dollars in projects were either announced or already in the works.

Why it matters
Commercial real estate brokers say the continued growth of UAB will present a number of opportunities for city center development, especially near campus.

QUOTABLE
"WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR faculty and staff, students and the local community, these projects exemplify the breadth of UAB's strategy for growth"
Ray Watts
University of Alabama at Birmingham

NOTABLE NUMBERS

$39M  Construction budget for UAB's new 700-bed residence hall (proposed rendering above).

Construction budget for the school's new student center, which will include upgraded dining facilities and a visitors center.

Construction budget for the Abroms-Engel Institute for Visual Arts.

KEY DATES

April 2013: University of Alabama System Board of Trustees approved the residence hall project.

August 2013: First phase of demolition planned for student center project.

Fall 2015: Date the new residence hall and student center are expected to open.

FAST FACTS: The University of Alabama System's Board of Trustees approved UAB's residence hall project earlier this month. The project is expected to be complete in fall 2015.
Why health care reform may hit Alabama harder than others

Alabama is projected to have among the largest spike in individual health insurance costs mostly because the Affordable Care Act will require providers in the state to no longer deny enrollees with pre-existing medical conditions, a University of Alabama at Birmingham professor said.

"The difference in Alabama and states where you see big increases is ... that the individual market is underwritten," said Michael Morrisey, director of the Lister Hill Center for Health Policy at UAB. "In states like ours, people with pre-existing conditions are less likely to have coverage, but now they're being brought into the individual market risk pool with Obamacare, and they push up the average."

Morrisey is speaking in reference to a study published by the Society of Actuaries that looked at how much individual policies are projected to increase once the health care reform law's individual mandate and health care exchange go into effect next year.

The average monthly cost per non-group member nationwide will jump nearly 32 percent should all 50 states opt into the Medicaid expansion, according to the SOA study.

But since some states, including Alabama, have opted against expanding Medicaid coverage, the study also projected a different figure for the jump in average monthly costs for non-group members.

That figure in Alabama is estimated to go from a pre-health reform average of $263 per member to a post-health reform average of $416, showing a 58 percent hike.

Regardless of whether all states take part in the Medicaid expansion, the study still places Alabama in the top 10 in the projected spike in non-group costs. Alabama places sixth without the expansion and seventh with the expansion.

The individual mandate is a controversial and key provision of the health reform law that requires individuals with the means to afford health coverage to buy a benefit plan or face penalties.

The health exchange creates a market place for buyers to search and compare benefit plans.

Morrisey said the individual mandate has a calmer effect in states that have eliminated medical underwriting, a practice that allows providers to use a person's medical information to determine coverage.

Two states that will actually see cost reductions in individuals are Vermont and Massachusetts, which no longer allow medical underwriting, he said.

With a Medicaid expansion, Vermont is projected to see a 12.5 percent reduction in individual premiums, while costs in Massachusetts will drop 12.8 percent.

Without the expansion, Vermont is expected to see a 7.1 percent drop, while Massachusetts is projected for an 8 percent drop.

Vermont and Massachusetts are expected to drop because more healthy people will be required to buy plans, Morrisey said.

"What you'll find in states with big increases in premiums is that all of those tend to have very low average premiums before Obamacare, somewhere in the neighborhood of $200 to $250 per member per month, but see the biggest increase (under Obamacare)," he said.

"In contrast, Vermont is already at $580, $590, before Obamacare."

Health insurance experts I spoke with for a recent BBJ print story told me that the health exchange is expected to make the health insurance market more competitive, but they also noted costs may not fall immediately due to healthy individuals who may opt out of the mandate by choosing to pay the less expensive penalties.
UAH President Robert Altenkirch appointed to NASA committee

By: Paul Gattis

University of Alabama in Huntsville President Robert Altenkirch has been named to NASA's Research Subcommittee of the Human Exploration and Operations Committee, the school announced today.

The scope of the committee, according to NASA's website, includes all human exploration and operations-related programs, projects, activities and facilities at NASA.

Altenkirch has a long history working in NASA-related research. He has served as principal investigator for experiments on eight space shuttle flights to investigate the spread of fire in reduced gravity environments. He has also written more than 50 publications and made about 100 presentations in combustion and heat transfer.

He was also a member of the National Research Council Committee on Microgravity Research where he contributed to a pair of reports -- "An Initial Review of Microgravity Research in Support of Human Exploration and Development of Space," and "Microgravity Research in Support of Technologies for the Human Exploration and Development of Space and Planetary Bodies."
'Gangnam Style': UAH students create app to teach robot the moves

By: Paul Gattis

Who says a little college research can't be fun?

Three students at the University of Alabama in Huntsville have "taught" a robot the moves to the "Gangnam Style" dance craze.

The students -- Roslyn Brown of Huntsville, Heather Helton of Hazel Green and A.C. Thomas of St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands -- have helped create an Android application to control the robot's movements. They are part of a master's degree class in software engineering that have developed the app.

The movements are controlled "through the tilt screen with video feedback from the robot's camera, through manual movements the robot can perform (head, arms, legs, hands), create movement sequences to piece together movements, and a unique demo functionality that allows the robot to show his range of motion by dancing," Helton told the UA System Board of Trustees when the robot made his debut at a meeting earlier this month.

The "Gangnam Style" dance, of course, comes from Korean artist Psy. The music video for the song has gone viral worldwide, having been viewed more than 1.5 billion times on YouTube.

The robot performed the "Gangnam Style" dance for the trustees. The school released the dance video today.

At the beginning of his presentation, UAH President Robert Altenkirch handled the introduction of the robot to the trustees.

"As you have noticed, a member of our campus has joined us, a teacher you could say," Altenkirch said. "This robot is used as part of the curriculum in our electrical and computer engineering department.

"The addition of this robot to our classroom instruction gives our students improved hands-on experience in writing software code and experimenting with creating movements for this device."
UAH student wins first place at Stillman's annual Zelpha Wells Piano Competition

Jeongeun Park, a University of Alabama-Huntsville student, received first place in the College Division, and Elizabeth Tsai, a 14-year-old home school student from Birmingham, received first place in the Junior Division at Stillman College's Annual Zelpha Wells Piano Competition. Ana Maria Crasi, a junior from Alabama School of Fine Arts in Birmingham, placed second in the Junior Division. Other College finalists were Daniel Tankersley, Pikrina Saliashvili and Christian McGee. Other Junior Division finalists were Mira Walker and Christina Lewis.

Finalists competed in a semi-final round before advancing to the final.

Competitors submitted three selections to qualify for the first round. For the final round of competition, finalists performed in a concert on April 20. Park played "The Lark" by Mily Balakirev. Tsai played "Scherzo No. 3 in C sharp minor, Op. 39" by Frederic Chopin. And Crasi played Hungarian Rhapsody No. 11 in A minor" by Franz Liszt.

"This year, Stillman attracted competitors from universities and colleges throughout Alabama and Mississippi," stated Dr. Hye-Sook Jung, assistant professor of music in the Division of Arts and Sciences at Stillman College. "A total of 18 college students and 12 junior students participated in this event. Four top students of each division competed again at 7 p.m. on Saturday. Most of these pianists had already won either national or regional competitions."

The Zelpha Wells Piano Competition pays homage to one of Tuscaloosa's most distinguished citizens, music educators and humanitarians. A graduate of Talladega College, where she majored in piano and minored in organ and public school music, Zelpha Wells received certificates in music from Peabody College and Fisk University. She has been featured in Time magazine and on The Oprah Winfrey Show, and is a member of the Alabama Jazz Hall of Fame. Wells has taught music for more than 50 years and is internationally known as a pianist and purveyor of music. Wells began her career by teaching music in public schools. In 1976, she formed Zelpha's Cultural Development Corporation in order to give free music lessons to children.
UAH grad student trains Madison teenagers in geographic technology

By: Gregg Parker

A University of Alabama in Huntsville graduate student has shown Madison teenagers ways that cell phone technology can help them both study and protect the environment.

Texas native Eric Anderson, a student in UAH’s Atmospheric Science Department, was inspired by his environmental science teacher in high school. He worked with teachers at Bob Jones and James Clemens high schools to create two classes and a field trip activity.

Anderson’s efforts involved students with geographic information systems (GIS) and mastering skills that their advanced placement (AP) classes require.

“GIS was the tool for understanding the water-related content they had to master for those AP classes,” Anderson said.

All students were familiar with GIS because of Global Positioning Systems (GPS) systems in cell phones and car navigation systems. “On day one, all hands went up when I asked how many students knew about GPS,” Anderson said.

On his first day of lecture, Anderson was pleased when a student asked, “Can GIS tell us about a storm, where it might flood and the people who might be affected?” “That was a nice reaction,” Anderson said. “They were not only understanding the material but were beginning to make their own inferences from it.”

The Bob Jones and James Clemens classes already had collected water samples from area streams for their environmental science curriculum. “This time, they saw those sites on a map. They could see relationships between their samples and the things that were upstream,” Anderson said.

Before the field trip, Anderson taught a computer lab to introduce students to software developed by ESRI, which donated site licenses to the schools for this project. The students then collaborated on mapping their various samples and comparing the water quality at several locations.

GIS classes were a natural spin-off of Anderson’s work at UAH. His thesis research involves development of tools to reduce landslide threats in Central America. He also provides payload support for NASA’s ISERV instrument aboard the International Space Station.
UAH Students’ Octocopter An Aerial Option For Storm Surveys

By: David Wood and Drew Gallaway

Saturday marks two years since the tornadoes of April 27, 2011 ripped the Tennessee Valley apart—changing lives and landscapes.

Since that time we’ve shown you the aftermath, the resolve to rebuild and the resulting progress in a myriad of different platforms, but none quite as rudimentary, yet fascinating as an emerging technology WHNT News 19 recently stumbled upon.

Forecasters use views from above to analyze damage data and even help categorize storms. So, could there be a cheaper, quicker, easier way to obtain and analyze aerial footage?

Would you believe a college student can do it with a remote control device?

Over the past two years, we’ve shown you many examples of aerial footage that illustrates not only what a powerful tornado can do but what dedication and hard work can accomplish.

The perspective gained with aerial surveillance has become an integral part of weather service analysis after the storm.

“Especially when we’re dealing with larger tornadoes, more violent tornadoes with longer tracks because it gives us a bigger, a better perspective of the damage in more of the harder hit areas,” said Huntsville Warning Coordination Meteorologist David Nadler.

Like getting a view from the top two years later in a ravaged area like Phil Campbell, for example. Here, people lost their homes, their church and their school. The high school and home of the wildcats has been wiped clean, being rebuilt now from the ground up.

The octo-copter, used to capture aerial video, was designed by UAH student Chris Sallis and his engineer buddies Mike and Richard.

“We weren’t really happy with many products on the market so we developed our own frame and integrated a lot of systems that were commercially available and some we developed ourselves,” said Sallis

Chris has been flying remote craft as a hobby for 14 years now, but this sophisticated system allows footage to be streamed instantly in real-time.

“I have a video downlink coming from the octo-copter that allows me to see its perspective and it goes straight to these video goggles, which basically makes it feel like you’re actually sitting in the cockpit of it,” said Sallis

In the cockpit of a 14 pound but powerful device that can withstand hefty wind gusts and climb safely to over 400 feet.

See next page
“The flight control system we chose to use for this aircraft makes it literally hands-off, I mean I can completely let go of the aircraft and it’s perfectly stabilized, it holds altitude and GPS position,” said Sallis. This provides high quality results—instantly.

“This type of technology is greatly beneficial in disaster situations,” said Sallis.

Aerospace engineering student Chris Sallis is involved with a lot more than playing with remote control helicopters. His work on full scale military aircraft has taken him to Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and most recently Korea.
Professor wants to know why tornadoes occur

By: Deangelo McDaniel

Do you live in an area prone to tornadoes?

Kevin Knupp, a professor of atmospheric sciences at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, has been trying to answer that question since he witnessed an EF5 tornado in 1976 as a graduate student at Iowa State University.

The problem with drawing a definitive conclusion is that adequate statistics are not available, he said.

“As devastating as tornadoes can be, they are rare,” Knupp said.

Rarity is why each time atmospheric conditions in the Tennessee Valley are suitable for a super cell, Knupp and a group of UAH graduate students swing into action. They are in the midst of a research project to determine how gravity waves and topography influence tornadoes.

The research group also wants to know if storms have preferred paths, something that may take a long time to say with certainty, Knupp said.

His research already is showing that tornadoes appear to be stronger when they descend from mountains.

That is something Knupp noticed in 1989, when he studied the tornado that ripped through Airport Road in Huntsville. The damage was less as the tornado went up the western boundary of Jones Valley.

The damage intensified as the storm came down Chapman Mountain, eventually destroying Jones Valley Elementary School.

Knupp’s research on tornadoes that blew through Alabama on April 27, 2011, is not complete, but the EF5 twister that traveled an estimated 132 miles did its most damage while descending.

Less than five miles after leaving the mountainous landscape of east Franklin County, the tornado roared through Mount Hope, killing five and erasing everything in its path.

By the time it reached Ronald and Tina Little’s home, the tornado had a width of 1¾ miles and was packing winds in excess of 210 mph, said Chris Darden, of the National Weather Service in Huntsville.

The tornado was descending when it killed a father and son in Mount Moriah and six in the Chalybeate area.

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It also came down a mountain when it destroyed Sonny’s Barbecue in Hillsboro and five homes in one family.

The tornado followed an almost identical path as a twister on April 3, 1974, when 14 were killed in Lawrence County.

"I just don’t have a good answer for why tornadoes sometimes take the same path," Darden said. "There are a lot of theories, but nothing scientific I can point to."

Eddie Cosby, who resides in an area known as Beulah Land in south Limestone County, said he doesn’t need science to know he’s in a tornado alley.

The 1974 tornado destroyed his five-bedroom home, and neighbors found him in a field with a 2-by-4 protruding from his side.

Cosby rebuilt on the site, as did others.

Two years ago today, he was resting in his recliner at about 3:30 p.m. when a co-worker told him a tornado was coming his way.

From his back porch, Cosby saw two funnels coming from the west. He crawled underneath a concrete porch, the only part of his home to survive the tornado 37 years earlier.

When the roar stopped, Cosby emerged from underneath the porch to a scene eerily like the one in 1974.

"Man may not understand it, but there’s something about this area that tornadoes love," Cosby said.

Morgan County Emergency Management Agency Director Eddie Hicks said he is often asked whether they reside in "Tornado Alley."

"I can’t tell them they do, because I don’t have research to support my answer," he said. "But what can I say to the people in Swan Creek if they believe they do?"

Swan Creek is a mobile home development on U.S. 31 between Decatur and Tanner that suffered heavy damage in 1974 and in 2011.

UAH scientists are analyzing data from April 27, 2011. They hope to learn why the storms were so powerful and what can be done to make tornado warnings more effective.

On the night of April 18, Knupp and graduate students gathered at the National Space Science and Technology Center on the UAH campus.
They do this every time inclement weather approaches. On this day, a cold front triggered strong thunderstorms, lightning and damaging wind gusts up to 70 mph.

Some of the students launched a weather balloon, while a second group left campus and set up a mobile radar near Meridianville in Madison County.

“We need to measure what’s going on in the environment,” Knupp said.

There was no rotation in the storms this night.

The majority of Knupp’s early research has focused on gravity waves, which bounce through the air much like waves on water. They are a result of the gravitational pull of the earth countering atmospheric buoyancy.

The new research suggests that when gravity waves encounter a potential tornado, they increase a tornado’s likelihood. When they meet an already developed tornado, Knupp said, the waves increase its intensity.

He expects his research to help forecasters more accurately predict when and where tornadoes form.
UAH, Army team to further research and development of unmanned aircraft systems

The University of Alabama in Huntsville has issued the following news release:

The University of Alabama in Huntsville and the Army's Unmanned Aircraft Systems Project Management Office are teaming up to promote the development of the next generation of unmanned aircraft systems, known as UAS.

UAH President Dr. Robert Altenkirch and U.S. Army Unmanned Aircraft Systems Project Manager Col. Timothy Baxter signed a memorandum of understanding at ceremonies held yesterday at UAH. The agreement calls on the two to work together in the development of undergraduate and graduate level courses, as well as collaborative research in the field of unmanned aircraft systems.

"Education and research into unmanned aircraft systems is quickly emerging as a critical discipline for this university and the U.S. Army agencies at Redstone Arsenal," Altenkirch said. "Our diligence in this field is just one of the many ways our faculty and students are able to support our partners in the greater Huntsville area. While the military benefits are obvious, we are also seeing an increasing interest among the nation's law enforcement forces and first responders as well."

The program will allow the Army to benefit from student research and develop the next generation of scientists and engineers, Baxter said.

"Universities see unmanned aircraft technologies as the way of the future and we are seeing more and more schools stand up programs for the research and development of unmanned systems. This effort will allow the Army to further promote independent research and development at the university level and develop student interest in the Army's UAS program. Ultimately, UAH, the Army and the students themselves will benefit from the student work."

UAS research is already being done at UAH's Rotorcraft Systems Engineering and Simulation Center, or RSESC, and Systems Management and Production Center, SMAP.

According to acting director Sue O'Brien, RSESC has developed expertise in engineering design, analysis, fabrication, integration, and flight testing of a wide variety of vehicles, including aircraft, rotorcraft, satellites, and spacecraft. RSESC currently employs more than 35 engineering students to support research and test efforts. They recently completed the development and flight certification of a UAS trainer for the AH-64 Apache and is currently working with the Army to improve the procedures used to handle crash damaged aircraft, including the UAS Gray Eagle.

RSESC is also leading a team of commercial companies and universities to compete nationally to land one of six Federal Aviation Administration UAS test sites.

SMAP is researching employment of micro-Unmanned Aerial Vehicles for low-cost surveillance by using remotely controlled helicopters with funding from the U.S. Army's Aviation and Missile Research and Development Center.

See next page
Directed by Dr. Gary Maddux, SMAP is the largest of the university's 15 research centers and institutions.
Scientists use DNA scanner to hunt invasive plants

The Associated Press

HUNTSVILLE | Researchers at the University of Alabama in Huntsville are using DNA to identify invasive plants and help them from spreading in the United States.

"The research involves a portable DNA scanner to identify unwanted plants — even if they are masquerading as something else.

“It really is plant forensics,” University of Alabama in Huntsville biologist Dr. Leland Cseke said in a university report. “What we’re trying to identify is, who’s your daddy?”

One of the main targets of the research is congongrass, al.com reported. Congongrass is a fast-growing weed that chokes out other plants and burns with a dangerous intensity in forest fires.

The plant has an ornamental alternate identity as Japanese blood grass or Red Baron grass. That seemingly harmless ornamental “can spontaneously revert to a form that looks and behaves exactly the same as congongrass,” Cseke said.

Congo grass arrived in the U.S. near Mobile and other southern ports in the early 1900s. It was produced by nurseries and sold across the South. Now, there are fears it will cross-pollinate with a species adapted to the cold and spread as far north as Canada.

“At the molecular level, they are all basically the same,” Cseke. “Their DNA sequence is the same except for one or two base pairs in specific regions of the genome.”

That’s where a device invented by Dr. Jian Han enters the picture. It performs rapid, automatic DNA analysis.

“Molecular diagnosis has three major steps: get the DNA out from living things, called extraction; get the target gene amplified; and detect the target,” Han said.

Congo grass isn’t the only target.

Giant hogweed and a “wild” sugarcane are also threats. The sugarcane looks like the agricultural version but doesn’t produce the sugar. When those plants are identified and surrounded, the team is confident its work will continue. Plants that could become invasive arrive in the U.S. regularly, hitching a ride in the vents and filters of cargo ships.
Huntsville scientists are using fast DNA scanner to track down invasive plants even when they're hiding

By: Lee Roop

Researchers in Huntsville are using DNA to identify invasive plants getting a free ride into the United States. "It really is plant forensics," University of Alabama in Huntsville biologist Dr. Leland Cseke said in a university report. "What we're trying to identify is, who's your daddy?"

The research uses a portable DNA scanner to identify the unwanted plant even it is masquerading as something else. Villain or Target No. 1 is "congongrass," a fast-growing weed that choked out other plants and burns with a dangerous intensity in forest fires.

What makes this plant an evil genius is the fact it has an ornamental alternate identity as Japanese blood grass or Red Baron grass. That seemingly harmless ornamental "can spontaneously revert to a form that looks and behaves exactly the same as congongrass," Cseke said.

Congongrass arrived in the United States near Mobile and other southern ports in the early 1900s. It was produced by nurseries and sold across the South. Now, there are fears it will cross-pollinate with a species adapted to the cold and spread as far north as Canada. "At the molecular level, they are all basically the same," said Dr. Cseke. "Their DNA sequence is the same except for one or two base pairs in specific regions of the genome."

That's where a device invented by Dr. Jian Han enters the picture. Han's device, developed at Huntsville's HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology, was spun off to a company called iCubate. It performs rapid, automatic DNA analysis. "Molecular diagnosis has three major steps: get the DNA out from living things, called extraction; get the target gene amplified; and detect the target," Dr. Han said. "iCubate is the only system on the market that is fully integrated to do all these steps automatically, multiplexed so it can amplify many targets at once, and in a closed system that amplifies DNA in a cassette to prevent causing a false positive test result."

Congongrass isn't the only target. Giant hogweed and a "wild" sugarcane are also threats. The sugarcane looks like the agricultural version but doesn't produce the sugar. When those plants are identified and surrounded, the team is confident its work will continue. Plants that could become invasive arrive in the United Statues regularly, hitching a ride in the vents and filters of cargo ships.
Denied.

Bishop's appeal of murder charge, life sentence turned down

Brian Lawson
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The latest news

The Alabama Court of Criminal Appeals on Friday affirmed the capital murder conviction and life sentence of UAH shooter Amy Bishop without publishing the opinion.

The background

Bishop, 46, pleaded guilty last September to the 2010 shooting deaths of three UAH biology faculty colleagues and attempting to kill three others on campus during a faculty meeting. The guilty plea required a mini-trial that was held in September. Jurors took just more than 20 minutes to convict her. She was sentenced to life in prison without parole.

The appeal

In November she notified Madison County Circuit Judge Alan Mann that she planned to appeal her guilty plea and sentence. Her guilty plea included a provision where she waived her appeal rights. Her appeal was filed with the appeals court in February and swiftly rejected, based on today's ruling.

Bishop's plea hearing and those errors resulted in her not making an informed plea.

The Alabama Attorney General's Office, which handles criminal appeals, argued that Bishop, a Harvard-trained biologist, was fully aware of what she was doing and had a written plea agreement that she reviewed and signed containing all the relevant information.

The reaction

Smith said he was not shocked by the court's ruling. He said he will talk to Bishop to see what she wants to do next, such as appeal to the Alabama Supreme Court. "They said there was no issue preserved for appeal," Smith said after reviewing the court's opinion.

Madison County District Attorney Bob Broussard, who prosecuted Bishop, said she faces an uphill climb. "In my experience, it's extremely rare for someone to have a guilty plea reversed, so I'm not at all surprised that her efforts in appeal appear to be unsuccessful," Broussard said.

An appeals court Friday affirmed the capital murder conviction and life sentence of UAH shooter Amy Bishop. (File)
Shelton State president search suspended

Staff, wire report

MONTGOMERY — The head of the Alabama Community College System has suspended the search for a new president at Shelton State Community College without filling the position.

Chancellor Mark Heinrich, who was appointed in September 2012 after serving as president at Shelton State, said he would ask for a review of search policies regarding the presidential searches for Shelton State and Southern Union State Community College, which has campuses in Wadley, Valley and Opelika. Better transparency is the primary goal, he said.

"After careful study, review and consideration, I have determined that it is currently in the best interest of the institution to suspend the search for a new president. There were three candidates.

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SEARCH
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best interest of the Alabama Community College System and the affected institutions to terminate the presidential searches for Southern Union State Community College and Shelton State Community College without filling either position," Heinrich said in a statement.

After new procedures are in place, the search for a new Shel- ton State president will begin again. Heinrich said previous applicants could reapply at that time.

Alabama Board of Education member Yvette Richardson had voiced concerns about the viability of the process.

Heinrich said the new search guidelines would allow the system to attract the best candidates to the two-year schools.

New procedures should be in place in two months, and Heinrich said the appointees could begin their new jobs by the begin- ning of 2014.

Vicky Hawsey, president of Wallace State Community College in Hanceville, led the first search committee for Shelton State’s new president. She said the new procedures could mean that the same 11 members will not return for a second search.

However, she said it is not uncommon for a search to be re- renewed until the best candidate is found.

"Shelton State Community College deserves the most ex- ceptional leader for its next per- manent president," Hawsey said. "In my role as president of Wallace State Community College, I have reopened searches on many occasions in order to yield a slate of candidates that would provide the most highly qualified candidate for the position.

"I would expect the chancel- lor to do the same for a position as crucial as president of this fine institution."

Steve Fair is serving as Shel- ton State's interim president.

On April 11, the Hawsey-led search committee narrowed the Shelton State presidential candidates to three:

■ Robert Gunter of Marion, Ark., who now serves as deputy director for career and technical education at the Arkansas Department of Career Education;

■ Linda North of Opelika, the academic dean for Southern Union State Community College; and

■ Stephen Vacik, the presi- dent of Colby Community College in Colby, Kan.

According to the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education’s Legal and Human Resources Division, 48 people applied for the post at Southern Union and 42 candidates applied for the position at Shelton State.
COLLEGE BASEBALL

UAB mistakes costly in loss to Samford

Samford 4, UAB 3

UAB made four errors and had two big baserunning mistakes late in the game, costing the Blazers in a 4-3 loss to Samford at Young Memorial Field on Tuesday night.

It was Samford’s eighth straight win over UAB (17-29).

One huge error led to Samford (24-21) taking the lead. Up 3-2 with one out in the second, UAB’s Cory Elker got Phillip Ervin to hit a slow grounder to second. Second baseman Tyler Hamby flipped to shortstop Tanner Bryant for the first out, but Bryant had to hurry his throw to first to get the speedy Ervin.

The throw went past first base and Samford scored twice to take a 4-3 lead.

Those runs ended up being earned, but Samford scored two unearned runs off UAB starter Alex Luna earlier in the game.

UAB pitchers also issued six walks and hit two batters.

The big baserunning error for UAB came in the eighth. Ivan De Jesus was hit by a pitch to lead off the inning and bunted over to second. With Jacob German up, a throw from catcher Richard Greene went past pitcher Andres Garcia. De Jesus tried to take third, but was thrown out by Samford second baseman Zeth Stone.

The second came in the ninth. With one out and Tyler Mims on first, Chase Davis lined a shot to right that dropped in, but as Mims took third, Davis was thrown out at second and appeared to hurt his shoulder on the play.

Tommy Corbin fielded John Frost’s bunt at third and threw him out to end the game.

UAB scored a run in the second when De Jesus doubled and scored on German’s groundout and two in the fifth. Hamby bunted to Samford pitcher Cole Limbaugh, who then threw it over first base.

allowing German to come around from first to score. Davis drove in Hamby with an RBI single for a 3-2 lead.

Samford’s first run came when Ervin singled and later scored on a wild pitch in the first inning. The Bulldogs took a 2-1 lead in the third on Christian Durdaller’s RBI single.

Parker Curry (1-2) got the win in relief for Samford and Eller (2-2) took the loss. Garcia pitched the final two innings for the save.

Samford hosts UNC-Greensboro in a Southern Conference weekend series and UAB hosts Rice in a Conference USA weekend series, both beginning on Friday.
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This one was for the steak and potatoes.

The White team, led by strong offensive performances from quarterback Jonathan Perry, running back Greg Franklin and receiver J.J. Nelson, outlasted the Green team 38-27 at UAB's spring game Saturday as the Blazers finished spring practice at the West Campus Field.

As head coach Garrick McGee put it, "One team's going to have a really good dinner that college kids don't get to have much and one team's going to eat what college kids normally eat."

There was buildup all week as coaches divided the teams evenly and split up the coaching staff. Even guest coaches were brought on board, as Tuscaloosa mayor Walt Maddox coached the White and ABC 33/40 meteorologist James Spann coached the Green.

"Coach McGee had stated before that the winner will eat steaks and the loser will eat wiener," Franklin said. "That's all you heard from Wednesday to today was who would eat steaks and who would eat wiener?"

Defensive end Chris Rabb had two sacks and another big tackle for loss on a reverse for the White team, and mentioned that the winning team would have steak and potatoes and the losing team hot dog and chips. McGee said the benefits went to the coaching staff. The White team will get more vacation time this spring, and the White team players will get more benefits during the summer offseason program.

Darrin Reaves led the Green team with 96 rushing yards and two touchdowns. Austin Brown, who started the final nine games last season at quarterback, threw for 169 yards and a touchdown, 24 yards to Jackie Williams, for the Green.

Perry was one of the stars, though, throwing for 250 yards on 18 of 27 passes with three touchdowns. He threw touchdowns of 11 and 10 yards to Franklin and 49 to Nelson, who caught five passes for 120 yards.

"I believe we came out really strong," Franklin said. "We came out and scored the first two drives. That really gave us a lot of momentum, a lot of confidence and a lot of energy."

Franklin ran 17 times for 92 yards and a 1-yard score. He caught four passes for 36 yards and two touchdowns.

McGee said he didn't have clear cut starters at any position when asked about the quarterbacks.

"At this part of the year, there's nobody that's starting," McGee said. "Once we get into the fall, where a lot of people spend most of their time thinking about who's starting, I spend all of my time thinking about who's going to be in the game in the fourth quarter because that's where the games are won."

McGee said the quarterback play was "efficient" but praised their abilities to check down to run or pass plays at the line of scrimmage. Freshman Jeremiah Briscoe (Green) struggled, going 0-for-10. Mike Miller went 6-of-9 for 29 yards.

Kelton Brackett had an interception for the White team.

STATISTICS
PASSING
GREEN: A. Brown 17-28-0-169, 1 TD; Briscoe 0-10-0
WHITE: Perry 18-27-0-250, 3 TD; Miller 6-9-0-0
RUSHING
GREEN: Reaves 14-99; Calloway 3-8
WHITE: Franklin 17-9; A. White 5-15; Vinson 1-7; Miller 3-16
RECEIVING
GREEN: J. Williams 4-59; Habowskie 3-20; Hunter 3-7; Pruitt 2-2; D. Reeves 3-20; Pickorn 1-12; D. Adams 3-42
WHITE: Nelson 5-120; Backman 3-22; Vinson 3-24; Franklin 4-30; J. Jones 2-3; A. White 2-40; Height 4-40; B. Davis 1-7; M. Reeves 1-4
PUNTNG: Tr. Long 2-2; AVG 40.5 average
DEFENSIVE LEADERS
GREEN: D. White, 5 tackles, 2 sacks, INT for TD; Challenger 8 tackles; Watford 7 tackles; Ganoz 7 tackles; Brown 2 tackles
WHITE: Brackett 7 tackles, 1 TFL, INT, PBU; C. Jones 10 tackles; Rabb 5 tackles, 2 sacks, 1 TFL
ALABAMA  
BASKETBALL  
Parents influenced Lacey on decision to transfer

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Trevor Lacey’s decision to transfer after two seasons as a starting guard at Alabama was influenced by his parents and caught coach Anthony Grant by surprise.

“Anytime there is change, there is always some element of surprise,” Grant said Friday during a postseason press conference that lasted nearly 30 minutes.

But the decision announced Tuesday was not sudden.

“Probably about two weeks ago, his mom and dad came in and met with me and expressed a desire for him to have that option to transfer,” Grant said. “So I talked with them and expressed where we were in terms of the opportunities he has here and where he was in terms of his overall development.

“For them, I think it was more of wanting to explore some different options.”

Lacey then joined the meeting.

“I think he understood where they were coming from,” Grant said. “Trevor is a great kid. He really enjoyed his teammates and understood what I asked of him and what he needed to do.”

Lacey met with his family last weekend.

“He came back on Tuesday and met with me and said that as a family, transferring was what they thought was in their best interest,” Grant said.

As a sophomore last season, Lacey split time between point guard and shooting guard and was the only Alabama player who started all 36 games. He averaged 11.3 points and 3.8 rebounds per game. He also led the Crimson Tide in assists (3.2 per game) and in 3-pointers made (62) and attempted (166).

“I enjoyed coaching him,” Grant said. “I think he certainly got better and I wish him the best of luck ...”

“It will give him the opportunity to try and figure some things out, and I think there are some things over the course of his two years here that he and I talked about in terms of what he needed to do to put himself in position to be where he is capable of being. Hopefully a change will give him the opportunity to realize some of those things and become what his family would like to see him become and what he wants to become.”

Lacey was the second starter to announce he will not be back at Alabama next season. Earlier this month, citing style of play as his reason, center Moussa Gueye said he will transfer. He played two seasons at Alabama as a junior college transfer and has one season of eligibility remaining. Because he has graduated, he will be eligible to play next season.

Grant was asked if he is worried about other players transferring and if it’s possible that he still could add to a four-man signing class.

“I can’t predict the future,” he said. “We are always going to continue to recruit and see if we can add pieces that will help our team. Recruiting is a process that never stops for us.”
So long, BCS; Hello, playoffs

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The biggest winner from Wednesday's College Football Playoff news: the Cotton, Chick-fil-A and Fiesta bowls. To the surprise of no one, they’re officially in the six-bowl playoff rotation for 12 years, and Cowboys Stadium won the bidding for the first championship game.

The biggest loser: Ryan Seacrest. Seacrest and anyone else who stages New Year's Eve countdown TV shows just saw their audience cut into by college football.

After years of college football damaging New Year's Day — one of the sport's most valuable brands — conference commissioners officially announced their tripleheader lineup with major bowls on both Dec. 31 and Jan. 1.

In the first season of the playoff, the Cotton, Orange and Fiesta bowls will be held Dec. 31, 2014. The next day, there's a Jan. 1 tripleheader featuring the Chick-fil-A, Rose and Sugar, with the Rose and Sugar serving as the first national semifinal games.

In eight of the 12 years of the playoff contract with ESPN, the semifinals will be played on Dec. 31. The Rose and Sugar bowls are guaranteed to be played on Jan. 1 or Jan. 2 every year even if those games are not staging semifinals.

See PLAYOFF, Page 4B

CAST YOUR VOTE

Officials are asking fans to vote for the logo [see choices below] for the new College Football Playoff at their website, collegefootballplayoff.com. Fans can vote once a day for the next five days. The logo receiving the most votes will become the official mark for the event, which will continue at least through the 2025-26 season.
PLAYOFF
From Page 1B

Last season's Chick-fil-A Bowl on Dec. 31 drew a 4.8 rating, the eighth-highest rated game in the bowl season.

"I think the whole cultural nature of New Year's Eve is gonna change in this country," BCS executive director Bill Hancock told reporters in Pasadena, Calif.

The first playoff championship game — officially called College Football Championship Game — will be Jan. 12, 2015, at Cowboys Stadium in Arlington, Texas. The championship will always be on a Monday. The playoff rotation:


* The Fiesta and Chick-fil-A have the semifinals Dec. 31, 2015; Dec. 31, 2018; Dec. 31, 2021; and Dec. 31, 2024.

* The Fiesta and Chick-fil-A may have to change its name to something like Chick-fil-A Peach to stay consistent with the playoff's position on standalone corporate names, ESPN.com reported.
New playoff system all but complete

The Associated Press

PASADENA, CALIF. | The College Football Playoff is all but done. The only part that remains unsettled is the membership of the selection committee that will determine which teams play for the national championship when the new system kicks in for the 2014 season.

Here's how it will work and what you need to know.

1. THINK BCS

The conference commissioners who spent more than a year putting the playoff together cringe when it's suggested that the new system is BCS 2.0, but to understand how it works, it helps to keep in mind how the Bowl Championship Series worked.

In the BCS, there were four, and then later five games played each season. Only one, the national championship game, had anything to do with the national championship. The others were glitzy bowl games played in showcase stadiums that—hopefully—had compelling matchups. Six conferences had automatic bids to those games, and other teams could earn automatic entry.

The new system will have a total of seven games, including two national semifinals and a final that will determine the national champion. The four other games will be glitzy bowl games played in showcase stadiums that—hopefully—will have compelling matchups. There will no longer be automatic bids for six conference champions, as was the case for the BCS.

Now, five conferences (the Big Ten, Big 12, SEC, ACC and Pac-12) each have guaranteed a spot for their conference champion in either the semifinals or one of the four glitzy bowls. There will also be a guaranteed spot for the best team from the five FBS conferences (the Big East, soon to be the American Athletic Conference, Mountain West, Sun Belt, Conference-USA and Mid-American).
2. THE MATCHUPS

The selection committee will, for the most part, make the matchups. Foremost it will seed the top four teams in the country, setting up the semifinals. No. 1 will play No. 4. No. 2 will play No. 3. The committee will try as best it can to avoid giving the lower-seeded team a geographical advantage. For example, if LSU is seeded fourth the committee is unlikely to let the Tigers play a semifinal in New Orleans.

The selection committee will also set some of the matchups in the glitzy bowls, with a priority on getting as many highly ranked teams as possible into the games.

But this is important: when the Rose Bowl does not host a semifinal it will always be Big Ten vs. Pac-12. The Sugar Bowl in years it does not host a semifinal will always be Southeastern Conference vs. Big 12. The Orange Bowl in the years it does not host a semifinal will always be Atlantic Coast Conference vs. either an SEC team, a Big Ten team or Notre Dame.

3. CONFERENCE LIMITATIONS

None. Unlike the BCS, which capped the number of teams from a conference at two, in the new system there is no limit to how many teams a league can put in the two semifinals or the other bowls. Four SEC teams? Sure, why stop there?

4. WHERE?

The semifinals will rotate through six bowl games: the Rose (Pasadena), Orange (Miami), Sugar (New Orleans), Fiesta (Glendale, Ariz.), Cotton (Arlington, Texas) and Chick-fil-A (Atlanta). When those games don't host a semifinal they will put one of the glitzy bowls.

The championship game will be bid out like the Super Bowl and move all over the country. The first one will be played at Cowboys Stadium in Arlington, Texas, also home of the Cotton Bowl.

5. WHEN?

Three games will be played back-to-back-to-back on New Year's Eve and there will be another tripleheader on New Year's Day. Adjustments will be made if Dec. 31 or Jan. 1 falls on a Sunday so as to not conflict with the NFL.

The championship game will always be played on a Monday, at least a week after the semifinals.

The first season the semifinals will be in the Rose and Sugar bowls on Jan. 1, 2015. The Rose will kick off around 4 p.m. The Sugar around 7:30 p.m.

The championship game in Texas will be played Jan. 12, and kick off around 7:30 p.m.

The Rose and Sugar bowls will always be played on New Year's Day, so in most seasons the semifinals will be played on New Year's Eve.

6. TV

All these games will be shown on ESPN. It has reportedly paid about $7.2 billion for the entire package.

7. WHERE ALL THAT MONEY GOES

About 85 percent of it will go to the Big Five conferences. The other five will split the rest, but don't feel too badly for them. Most will be making about five times the amount they made with the BCS.

8. AND ABOUT THAT SELECTION COMMITTEE

The idea was to make it similar to the one that puts together the NCAA basketball tournament, made up of athletic directors and conference commissioners. But make no mistake, this will be much tougher to put together, and the commissioners know that.

"This is an issue of considerable complexity and given how much time we have until the playoff begins, we're in no rush," BCS executive director Bill Hancock said Thursday. The final of three days of meetings at a resort hotel in the Rose Bowl's backyard.

Everything is apparently still up for debate, from who will be on the committee — current or former athletic administrators? — to how many people will be on it — 16? 18? 20? — to what kind of metrics and rankings it will be given to guide decisions.

9. HOW LONG BEFORE THIS SYSTEM CAN BE CHANGED?

The conferences are locked in on a 12-year deal based on a four-team playoff format. So it appears to be locked in for 12 years, even though the structure is there for it to grow.

10. WHY COLLEGE FOOTBALL WON'T GROW THE SYSTEM TO EIGHT OR 16 TEAMS

"Because we don't want to," Hancock said.

Of course, a few years ago some of the same people working on this didn't want a playoff system at all.
Embattled NCAA leadership will meet today

The Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS | NCAA President Mark Emmert looks and sounds increasingly frustrated. Some of the fast-track reforms he championed in August 2011 have been slowed down by the governing body's legislative process. Simplifying the rule book has proven trickier than expected. His own enforcement staff got swept into a major scandal this year, and Emmert has come under increasing scrutiny for presiding over all of this.

Yes, it's been a rough start to 2013.

"It's just a demonstration that this is a membership association and decision-making is hard. It's hard to find agreement among all the members and that's the nature of democratic processes," Emmert told The Associated Press this week. "As Winston Churchill put it, it's the worst of all systems except for everything else."

At least Emmert can still laugh a little as the NCAA's board of directors prepares to meet today. A lot has changed since the committee last met in person in mid-January.

Shortly after that meeting, Emmert announced publicly that the NCAA had botched its investigation of the University of Miami. A monthlong external investigation confirmed the initial findings and led to the ouster of NCAA enforcement director Julie Roe Lach. As speculation swirled about Emmert's own future, the board issued a rare — perhaps unprecedented — vote of confidence in his leadership.

Last month, the board suspended rules passed in January that would have deregulated which coaching staff members

See next page
Very little has gone right this year for NCAA President Mark Emmert, whose organization botched the Miami investigation.

Little has gone right lately for Emmert and the Indianapolis-based NCAA. Today's agenda illustrates what's at stake.

More discussion is expected on a rule passed in October 2011 that allowed schools to give athletes up to $2,000 beyond the cost of tuition, room and board, books and fees. It was later overridden by the membership, and the board has spent more than a year working on a new proposal.

Additional discussions are expected on a second phase of rulebook changes.

The board plans to talk about the recruiting rules that are now on hold. The board could take action, though the American Football Coaches Association has said the NCAA has asked the organization to serve on an advisory committee that will help draft modified legislation.
Flexing its muscle

SEC Commissioner Mike Slive upset NCAA hasn’t approved stipend for college athletes; hints towards ‘other alternative or division’

On the first working day after the National Football League Draft gave one more ringing confirmation that Southeastern Conference football is in a league of its own, a mighty lion sitting regally above its competition, SEC Commissioner Mike Slive, in his gentlemanly way, roared a little.

Asked in Birmingham on Monday at the Associated Press Sports Editors Southeast regional meeting about the future of “cost of attendance scholarships,” or, in simpler terms, a stipend — one of those technical issues that mean more to the schools that have to pay for it than to fans who just want to watch — Slive indicated that he and the SEC were ready for such legislation to pass.

“We’re disappointed it hasn’t passed already,” Slive said. “It is not an idea that is going away.”

Ultimately, Slive said, the SEC and its fellow giants on the college landscape will prevail against the NCAA governance or “it might be appropriate to talk about some other alternative or division.”

That isn’t a call for open secession. It is a recognition, on Slive’s part, of the power of his own league. That power is only going to grow as the SEC announces its own television network later this week, and when the playoff for college football arrives.

As a conversation topic, the populus at large cares a lot more about the playoff than it does about the stipend, or the pending Ed O’Bannon case, or scrutiny of the way the NCAA and its Management Council operate.

Slive talked extensively about the playoff topics as well. Of particular interest, though, were his comments on how it might affect scheduling in the future.

With the Big Ten announcing Sunday it was headed to a nine-game conference football schedule by 2016, there has been speculation about whether the SEC is headed in the same direction.

The league’s coaches (with the notable exception of Nick Saban) are not strongly in favor of it, but coaches aren’t going to be the ones who ultimately decide the issue. The league approved the 6-1-1 model currently in place at last year’s meeting in Destin, Fla., but that had the feeling of a temporary measure, not a permanent mandate.

“The playoff impacts how we (will) schedule,” Slive said. “I am open-minded about scheduling in the future.”

Obviously, for the 14-team SEC, the goal for most seasons under the four-team playoff format will be to have two representatives.

Last year, the SEC actually had three of the four best teams, but with a human selection committee involved in the process, it isn’t foreseeable that the SEC will monopolize three of four spots. That will become more clear when the new committee’s structure and membership is announced in the coming months.

“We want football expertise, integrity and transparency,” Slive said. “It will require those things, because it will not be an easy job.”

“Fundamentally, we will look at the culture of the (NCAA) basketball committee (which Slive once chaired),” he said. “We are still looking for the right number. The basketball committee is 10, but I think football will end up with 14 to 20 members.”

That might even include former media members, Slive said, adding generously that they have “football expertise.”

One hopes that no current media member would have the audacity to apply, or that ones who do would be summarily dismissed.

Slive didn’t say that. He didn’t have to. But what he does say, on all the issues above, carries weight, and plenty of it.

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