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Committing to the future

Bryant High students set post-graduation plans

By Drew Taylor
Staff Writer

Sydney Hughes wants to do something no one in her family has done: graduate from college.

On Thursday morning, Hughes announced her plans to make that a reality as she stood on a stage in front of hundreds of classmates during the third annual College and Career Commitment ceremony at Paul W. Bryant High School.

"My name is Sydney Hughes and I will be attending the University of Alabama as a first generation scholar," Hughes said as she was greeted with cheers.

Hughes was one of 240 Bryant High seniors to take part in the program, holding up the colors of their chosen college or job as they announced what they would be doing after high school.

Common answers students gave ranged from going to college to joining the armed forces. Around 99 percent of this year’s graduating class have either been accepted to a college or have lined up a job after high school.

"This is something I have always wanted to do," said Hughes, who plans to major in pre-medical studies at UA.

During the ceremony, Bryant principal Linda Harper congratulated the group for its commitment to set goals after high school.

"Today, we celebrate the beginning, not the end, of a bright future," Harper said.

The ceremony started out as an annual event in 2015 as a way to meet a need, Harper said.

"Before, some students would get a diploma and have nowhere to go," she said.

During the last couple of years, school counselors have worked with outgoing seniors to establish what they wanted to do after college and set goals to accomplish what they wanted to do.

"Our kids are now motivated and are excited about their futures," she said.

One student, Aquaeuous Gibbs, made the commitment to join the Air Force and will be leaving for Texas this summer to begin training.

See FUTURE, A7
Students show off posters announcing where they will go to college or begin careers during the Paul Bryant High School College and Career Commitment Ceremony Thursday. [STAFF PHOTOS/GARY COSBY JR.]
“It was something I always wanted to do since I was little,” said Gibbs, adding that both her aunt and uncle served in the Air Force.

Laquarius Aaron, another senior at Bryant, said he would be studying at Alabama State University to become a teacher.

“Nobody gave me a good education growing up,” he said. “I just want to give back to my people.”

Joe Eatmon, head basketball coach at Shelton State Community College, briefly spoke at the ceremony, where he encouraged the graduating class to continue pushing forward with their goals.

“The thing about commitment is that once you commit, that’s where the real work begins,” Eatmon said. “Once you commit and the journey begins, then you have to go to work.”

Gibbs said she loved the commitment ceremony and that it was an integral part of Bryant High’s traditions.

“I’m just glad I got to be here with my friends,” Gibbs said.

Harper said that since starting the commitment ceremony in 2015, there has been a change in how students prepare for the future.

“There are ninth-graders who are now studying to take the ACT,” she said. “There are kids now discussing where they want to go to college.”

Before ending the ceremony, Harper offered the graduating class a word of advice.

“Don’t let anyone tell you something is too tough or has never been done before,” she said. “Just do it.”

Bryant’s graduation will be held May 20.

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Inaccurate graduation rates never vetted by local schools

Superintendent ‘astonished’ bad data was published

Trisha Powell Crain
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Alabama’s board of education members received an explanation this week for how inaccurate graduation rate data was published: The data had not been properly vetted with local school districts.

State superintendent Michael Sentance told board members Wednesday he was “astonished” that the inaccurate data was published, particularly given the importance that graduation numbers be absolutely right after federal officials said Alabama had artificially inflated graduation rates in recent years.

After the meeting, Sentance said he has not ruled out taking personnel actions against the person or persons responsible for not following “common sense” protocols.

Sentance took responsibility for the mistake, saying he assumed that protocols followed in previous years had been followed again this year.

If there was any good news, it was that when the rates are corrected, graduation rates for 2016 might ultimately rise. Tony Thacker, director of the department’s research and technology area, said statewide, the rate may not go up much, but correcting the rates could make a big difference for some local school districts.

Thacker shared the new data protocol put in place and said he now has the final word on data before it is publicly released. School districts will now be given 15 days to vet data before a public release.

Local school officials began questioning rates almost immediately when they were released, but because the data went online just before 5 p.m. on a Friday prior to a state three-day holiday, local school officials couldn’t get answers from anyone at the state department.

State education officials released a statement late Tuesday afternoon describing why the rates were inaccurate. Simply put, they moved too many students from the “graduate” to the “completer” category based on a series of course codes as opposed to course descriptions.

Sentance said he understood why superintendents were angry, and said he was angry, too.

Federal officials only count courses toward graduation that are fully aligned with a state’s academic standards. For graduates in 2014 and 2015, state officials were told they incorrectly counted Essentials/Life Skills courses as fully aligned, and therefore counted students taking those courses as “graduates,” resulting in artificially inflated graduation rates.

Eric Mackey, executive director of the School Superintendents of Alabama, said he confirmed two valedictorians from the class of 2016 had been moved to the “completer” category based on the categorization of course work as “Essentials” courses.

Board Vice President Yvette Richardson, D-Birmingham, said she was not satisfied that enough has been done to determine who is directly responsible for the series of mistakes and looks forward to a continued investigation.

Sentance could not give any timeline for the release of corrected graduation rates.
ALABAMA SCHOOLS

State removes previously published 2016 grad rates

Trisha Powell Crain  
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The Alabama Department of Education removed previously published 2016 graduation rates from its web site on Tuesday morning, a day after superintendents across the state began to question the accuracy of the data.

"There were a number of mistakes made, both in data manipulation and basic protocol," Alabama state superintendent Michael Sentance said in a statement late Tuesday.

"We owe it to not only the educators, but the community at large, to make sure our data is solid and reliable. At a minimum we should have given local systems the basic consideration of vetting the data we are making public on their behalf."

The state is investigating how the mistakes were made and is working on protocols to avoid similar issues in the future, he said.

Data released late Friday showed Alabama's statewide graduation rate dropped 4.5 percentage points, from 89.3 percent in 2015 to 84.8 percent in 2016.

Initial results of the federal investigation indicated Alabama officials had included students taking coursework not aligned with Alabama's academic standards as regular graduates when compiling the 2014 graduation rates, in violation of federal guidelines.
State's 2016 grad rate: 84.8%

Trisha Powell Crain  tcrain@al.com

The Alabama State Department of Education published high school graduation rates for the class of 2016 on Friday.

The actual graduation rate for all students was 84.8 percent, down 4.5 percentage points from 89.3 percent in 2015.

Of 56,575 high school seniors in the class of 2016, 47,977 counted as graduates.

Federal investigators from the Office of Inspector General reviewed Alabama's graduation rates last year and determined Alabama's 2015 graduation rate of 89.3 percent, third highest in the nation, was artificially inflated.

"In some cases, local school systems misstated student records and awarded class credit, resulting in diplomas that were not honestly earned," read an official statement Friday by the Alabama Department of Education.

No press release accompanied the Friday's 2016 data release, but at last week's state board of education meeting, state superintendent Michael Sentance said, "A decline of four percent is pretty significant, and we're still working through issues, making sure that credit recovery and data entry among other things are being done properly, so I wouldn't say this is a closed issue."

Sentance said the OIG's official report on the investigation was expected to be released by the end of May. He couldn't comment on what would be in the report, he said.

Statewide rates in 2016 were lower for every subgroup, dropping 31.5 percentage points for students in special education.

College and career readiness rates were published as well. That rate increased from 70 percent to 75 percent, meaning that 75 percent of students that graduated from high school met at least one of the following six benchmarks:

1. Benchmark score on any section of the ACT college entrance test.
2. Qualifying score on an Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate exam.
3. Approved transcripted college or postsecondary credit while in high school.
5. Accepted for enlistment into the military.
6. Approved career tech industry credential.

Sentance previously said the college and career readiness indicator rate is a better measure of readiness, as it is tied to a credential.

The state board of education did away with the high school graduation exam beginning with the class of 2014.

Last December, Sentance said federal investigators discovered two problems with how Alabama calculated its 2015 graduation rate:

1. Students on the Alabama occupational diploma track (designed for students with significant disabilities) should not have been counted as graduates. Sentance said state officials were informed in 2012 that those students should have been counted as completers.
2. The state department was not properly overseeing the awarding of credits in local school districts to ensure graduation rates were accurate.

Since 2011, the federal government has required uniformity in how schools report graduation rates to allow for comparisons to be made across districts and states. The graduation rate represents students who graduated four years after enrolling in the ninth grade. It is sometimes referred to as the "four-year cohort graduation rate."
Gov. Kay Ivey appoints Lyn Stuart Alabama Chief Justice

By: Jeremy Gray

Gov. Kay Ivey this afternoon appointed Associate Justice Lyn Stuart to serve as the new Chief Justice of the Alabama State Supreme Court.

The appointment comes after former chief justice Roy Moore, suspended from the court for the remainder of his term, announced today he was resigning to run for the United States Senate.

"Chief Justice Stuart has served with honor and integrity on the high court for over 16 years. I look forward to working with her as she now leads the judicial branch of state government," Ivey said.

It was Stuart who administered Ivey's oath of office after the resignation of former Gov. Robert Bentley.

Chief Justice Lyn Stuart is a native of Atmore. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Auburn University with high honor in 1977 and her Juris Doctorate degree from the University of Alabama in 1980. Her legal career includes stints as an Assistant State Attorney General, Special Assistant Attorney General for the State Department of Corrections, and as an Assistant District Attorney for Baldwin County.

She was elected a District Judge in 1988 and again in 1994. She was appointed a Circuit Court Judge in 1997 and was elected to the position in 1998. She has been elected three times to the Supreme Court, in 2000, 2006 and 2012.

Stuart has served as Acting Chief Justice since Moore's suspension began on May 6, 2016.

"I also thank Roy Moore for his years of public service to the people of Alabama and wish him the best in the next step of his journey," Ivey added.

Moore's resignation gives Ivey a chance to make a quick and lasting impact on the state's court system.

In addition to naming Stuart chief justice, Ivey will now be able to appoint a new associate justice to give Alabama's highest court its full nine members.

If Ivey appoints a judge from a lower court to the state supreme court, she can then appoint a new judge to that court.

Sue Bell Cobb in 2006 became the first woman to serve as Alabama's Chief Justice. With Stuart as chief justice and Ivey governor, this is likely the first time two branches of Alabama government have been led by women.

Associate Justice Tom Parker said today he plans to run for chief justice in 2018.
The decision by Gov. Kay Ivey to declare a special election for Jeff Sessions' U.S. Senate seat this year rather than next year changes the entire complexion of the race for who will sit in that coveted seat. It also redefines the landscape of an ever changing and pivotal Alabama political scene.

This next year will be an adventure as we elect a senator and concurrently the 2018 governor's race will begin its evolution. We have already seen the downfall of a sitting governor this year and by Sept. 26, we will see the election of a new junior U.S. senator. There is an assumption that only a Republican can win statewide office in Alabama and winning the GOP primary is tantamount to election.

The decision by Gov. Ivey was the right decision. Most folks would assume that “forthwith” means this year rather than next year. It was also a wise political move by the governor if she wants to run for a full term. Scheduling the special election for Sessions' seat immediately could be the death knell for Luther Strange. By December, he may go from being the newest and tallest member of the U.S. Senate to the shortest serving senator in Alabama history. His defeat could be inglorious and humiliating.

With the election being this year, it will be the only show in town. It will be a spectacle. Every politician who is in any office can run without risking his or her current post. In other words, everyone has a free shot. Therefore, it will be a free-for-all.

Everyone will run against poor Big Luther and the Bentley taint. They will use their campaign resources to give you the unmitigated details of how Luther got put in that seat by ol' Bentley. You will be told so many times that Bentley and Luther got together in a backroom with Rebekah and brokered a deal to hand Luther the Senate seat in return for Luther not prosecuting Bentley that you will be tired of it. Luther will be as tarnished as Bentley.

In about two weeks, when the Washington PACs see the polling that reveals Luther is in trouble, his campaign resources will be less than he expected and he may not be able to defend against the onslaught of negative ads. The question becomes, who will be the early frontrunners? Roy Moore enters as the favorite. His evangelical base becomes crystallized in a large field. It will probably reserve him a place in the Sept. 26 run-off. Who will be the other candidate in the runoff? It very well may not be Strange.

The U.S. Senate is a select club. A cursory look around the chamber reveals very wealthy people or celebrities. Senate seats are bought by wealthy individuals in a good many cases. We have some people in Alabama who could very easily buy the Senate seat.

The short period of time that exists to raise money for an Aug. 15 primary even further enhances the advantage for someone who can self-finance and write a big check.

It will be a great show.

See you next week.

Steve Flowers served 16 years in the Alabama Legislature. Readers can contact him at www.steveflowers.us.
Maddox has plenty of political options

It was no surprise Tuesday when Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox said he was considering running for higher office. It was also no surprise when he said that if he did so it would be as a Democrat.

Maddox has options. He can choose not to run. At 44, he’s got plenty of time. He was re-elected last month with almost 89 percent of the vote. It was his first challenge since he became mayor in 2005.

But his window of opportunity at a statewide position may never be greater, thanks in large part to the fact Republican leaders have in the past year imploded at the highest levels of state government.

Gov. Robert Bentley, Speaker of the Alabama House Mike Hubbard and Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore have all been disgraced and removed from office. If there ever was a time to convince voters of a solidly red state to give a Democrat a crack at improving things, it would be now.

Maddox could choose to make a run at governor. There’s no doubt he would be a frontrunner in the Democratic primary. He could also take a stab at the U.S. Senate seat that was vacated when Jeff Sessions moved to U.S. Attorney General. That seat is now occupied by Luther Strange, who carries significant baggage from the manner in which he was appointed by Bentley to the seat just weeks before Bentley was forced to resign from office.

Oddly enough, Moore just announced this week that he’s vying for that seat. Moore joins Strange at the forefront of what will be a crowded GOP field in the Aug. 15 primary. With a field of Republican contenders vying to prove to voters who is the most conservative, hard-right candidate in the crowd, Maddox would clearly be a different option.

And there’s always the possibility that others entering the Senate race could open new opportunities for Maddox to move up. Maddox has an impressive record as a moderate Democrat, but he’ll enter the batter’s box with two strikes against him in any statewide race by no fault of his own. He could still hit a home run. But there will be no margin for error.

Strike one is that the statewide Democratic party is in shambles. Its leadership is worse than lacking. Maddox’s ties to the Alabama Education Association no longer bring with it an abundance of funding and there is no semblance of the political apparatus it once used to dominate state politics.

Strike two is that while he enjoys an overwhelmingly positive reputation in West Alabama, he’ll have an uphill battle erasing the stain left by Bentley, who emerged relatively unknown from the Republican ranks as a state representative in Tuscaloosa to governor. Maddox had nothing to do with Bentley’s disastrous run as governor, but he will still have to work hard to break any association with voters in other areas of the state.

Regardless of his next move, having options speaks well of the job he’s done in Tuscaloosa.
Maddox considers higher offices

Mayor says decision will come in early 2018

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox is not saying he intends to run for governor in 2018. But he's not ruling it out, either.

Maddox, 44, addressed the question directly on Tuesday and his answer reflected the message he's been sending on social media for months. “It's certainly a possibility,” Maddox said regarding his decision to seek the governor's seat.

He said the same regarding the upcoming U.S. Senate election to fulfill the unexpired term of ex-Sen. Jeff Sessions, who is now the nation's attorney general.

Maddox said he's been approached by groups gauging his interest in both offices, something he attributed to the “amazing team we have here at the city.”

But for now, the political climate is too unstable for him to make a final decision and said he likely would know for sure by early 2018.

He said he'd consider the effects of either decision on his family – his wife, Stephanie; 14-year-old daughter, Taylor; and 3-year-old son, Eli – as well as his ability to get elected and his administration's ability to govern effectively.

“There's always the emotional appeal when the people who you trust believe you could do good not only for your city, but also your whole state,” Maddox said, “but I don't need higher office to feel professionally fulfilled.”

First elected mayor in 2005, Maddox was re-elected in March with nearly 90 percent of the vote in his first challenged race since then.

A former employee with the Alabama Education Association, Maddox saw the former AEA head Paul Hubbert as a mentor until Hubbert's death in 2014 at the age of 78.

To this end, Maddox acknowledged that if he does choose to run for governor or Senate, he would do so as a Democrat.

Doing so could serve to hinder his campaign among heavily Republican voters in Alabama, but Maddox said he does not see it as an unshakable albatross. Rather, he contends that voters want to see results from their elected officials, something he said has been sorely lacking in recent years.

He pointed to his success in both Republican and Democratic parts of Tuscaloosa, although municipal leaders in Tuscaloosa run non-partisan elections.

But he contends that the "D" that would follow his name on a ballot would add to the degree of electable difficulty.

“I think what we’ve experienced over the last several years is government failing to deliver on its promises,” Maddox said. “I’ve learned in 12 years in this office that it’s not about big government or small government, it’s about effective government.

“That opinion is not going to change, no matter what office I hold.”

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MADDOX

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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

Ex-Roby aide nominated to be assistant attorney general

Howard Koplowitz  hkoplowitz@al.com

An Alabamian may soon be reunited with his former boss, Attorney General Jeff Sessions, after Donald Trump nominated him on Tuesday to be an assistant attorney general. Stephen Boyd, who was Sessions' communications director in the Senate and later served for six years as chief of staff to Rep. Martha Roby, R-Montgomery, was among several nominations Trump forwarded to the Senate for confirmation. Boyd currently serves as the chief of staff of the Office of Legal Policy at the U.S. Department of Justice. Boyd’s nomination was lauded by Roby in a statement.

"Stephen possesses a keen intellect, conducts himself with the utmost professionalism and decorum, and he works extremely hard," Roby said. "Boyd will do the right thing."

Sessions also heaped high praise on his former staffer when he left to run Roby’s office.

"From the first day he joined my staff, Stephen has been a tremendous asset," Sessions said on the floor of the Senate in 2010. "He has earned the respect and admiration of his colleagues, and has proven himself as a leader. His journey is only beginning, and I wish him all the best in the months and years to come."
We cannot afford to lose Alabama's Humanities

Unfortunately, we often fail to appreciate the important things that enrich our lives until they are lost. The Alabama Humanities Foundation has been hard at work for more than 40 years providing programs to Alabamians, as part of a federal, state and local partnership. AHF has invested public and private resources in all 67 Alabama counties, extending from towns in the most remote corners of our state to the heart of the largest cities, along with just about every place in between. But even more than an investment in places, AHF is invested in individuals.

In the past three years, AHF brought Prime Time Family Reading Time to places like Lauderdale, Jefferson, Mobile, Tuscaloosa and Elmore counties. Countless children and their families have been helped with additional literacy and comprehension skills. For a state where one in four adults is functionally illiterate, we should be applauding, not cutting, this whole family approach to reading. This program has had positive, quantifiable results.

For 20 years, AHF has brought the Smithsonian Institution's Museum on Main Street to six towns and cities each year. Thousands of Alabamians have had an opportunity to see an actual Smithsonian exhibit that they might not have seen otherwise. In Red Bay, attendance at one Museum on Main Street exhibit was triple the size of the town’s population. In my hometown of Ashland, the impact was unmistakable. People came together around our shared common history as we looked at the ways our ancestors lived and worked. Thousands of people stepped back in time to remember what our people’s lives were like right here where we live.

JOHN ROCHESTER

In places like Demopolis and Pell City, Museum on Main Street became the catalyst for planning those cities' own museums. At Pell City's exhibit, children and adults who had never been inside a museum were personally touched by this experience. “You told our story,” people said to organizers over and over again.

Alabamians value our veterans and their sacrifices and service to our country. AHF’s Literature and the Veteran Experience uses literature to ease the transition from service to classroom. One Alabama veteran passionately described the impact of the program on his life: “This program has been instrumental for my transition back to civilian life. It helped me break out of my shell and reach out to fellow soldiers, veterans, and civilians. It accomplished what months of therapy could not.”

At our public libraries, with historical groups and in classrooms, Road Scholars, who are experts in their field, crisscross our state every year to enlighten, engage and inspire with informative talks and presentations on wide-ranging subjects.

Thousands of teachers across Alabama, as well as throughout the country, benefit from SUPER Teacher Institutes, like “Stony the Road,” which retraced the historic footsteps of the civil rights movement through places like Birmingham, Montgomery and Selma. Multiply that by the thousands of students with whom these teachers share what they learn, and it doesn’t take long to see how a handful of public and private dollars inform and reinforce the lessons of civil rights for future generations.

As a retired judge, I see great potential in the humanities-based program with law enforcement that AHF is preparing to pilot. The training, taught by experienced officials, will engage active law enforcement officers to consider lessons in fairness and justice by examining an internationally-known Alabama story. Through researching and interpreting Alabama’s 1931 Scottsboro Boys case, law enforcement professionals will think strategically about enhancing their own leadership and decision-making capacities.

By looking at how the case has been remembered and interpreted for over 85 years, officers will consider what scholars call “soft skills” that are needed for community policing. Though law enforcement officers are offered many opportunities for developing “hard skills,” such as firearms use and tactical training, the addition of “soft skills” training adds other valuable tools to an officer’s skill set. Most importantly, this course will give officers a unique opportunity for conversation about exercising judgment and ethics in the difficult work they do to serve and protect others every day.

As we examine the successful programs and initiatives of AHF, we must also consider the economic losses if we are forced to terminate them. Alabama Power Co. CEO, Mark Crosswhite, one of the most influential voices in economic development in our state, reasoned in a business magazine interview that critical thinking skills are sorely needed for economic advancement in Alabama. "Why does

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a business guy support the humanities?" he asked.
"The arts and humanities are some of our most under-appreciated efforts. Having a strong arts and cultural community can be a critical factor in getting a company to choose us over some other place. Supporting those great cultural amenities, that's part of economic development, too."

When thinking through the reasons to keep supporting the humanities, the number 4.8 million — Alabama's population — comes to mind. Every Alabama citizen can experience the benefits of the humanities. The humanities help guide individuals in their abilities to reason, think and make choices. They inspire, teach and promote the best in us. They encourage us to think critically about our choices, not simply by marching in lockstep, but by actually delving deeper into the problems and issues that face us so that we can reach solutions.

It's simple, really. The humanities fan out to include everyone. This is not a frivolous venture, nor an elitist luxury. Rather, the humanities are an exploration of who we are as Alabamians and Americans. We must not let the humanities slip away.

— John Rochester, a retired circuit judge for Clay and Coosa counties, is former chair and former interim executive director of the Alabama Humanities Foundation, the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.
Dual enrollment: good for students, good for Alabama

George Clark for AL.com

Dual enrollment is a program that allows students to earn college credits while still in high school. In other words, it is an opportunity for high school students to gain a leg up on their peers. The way it works is simple: Alabama community colleges partner with local high schools, and students use their elective periods to take college courses. The completed college coursework is applied to both the student's high school graduation requirements and the student's college transcript.

The results are tremendous. By the time a dual enrollment student graduates high school, it is possible that he or she will have earned enough credit hours to also receive a two-year degree. The credit hours through dual enrollment can be applied not only toward a two-year degree, but can also be transferable to a four-year university. Industry-recognized certifications also are available, qualifying students to enter the workforce immediately. Any of these outcomes should be considered a success depending on that particular student's needs and goals.

But there is a catch. The dual enrollment program is not free. Each student who enrolls in the program is responsible for paying program tuition to the community college. However, most students are afforded this otherwise unattainable opportunity through state-sponsored scholarships for career-technical dual enrollment. I was pleased in previous years when the Legislature appropriated $10.3 million to support Alabama's dual enrollment students, but it turns out that there was a greater demand than expected.

With only $10.3 million in available funds, over $12 million worth of dual enrollment scholarship applications were received from students across Alabama. While it is unfortunate that some motivated students were not able to take full advantage of the program, this is, in fact, good news. To me, this is clear evidence that the dual enrollment program is gaining in popularity and is working successfully.
I remain hopeful that the program will receive its additional funding. When I served in the Legislature, I considered funding proposals according to the state’s projected return on investment. For a program that so greatly benefits students, employers and the state, $5 million is a small price to pay.

Let me give you a real example. Just recently, I learned of a public high school student scheduled to graduate in a couple of months. Before he receives his high school diploma, he will have earned enough college credit hours to receive an associate’s degree, he has a $42,000-per-year job offer from a local manufacturing company and a scholarship offer from a four-year institution.

This is a real success story. The dual enrollment student is the clear winner, but so will be the manufacturer or the four-year school competing for him. Dual enrollment has given this student both educational and career-oriented options. It prepares young Alabamians to financially support themselves and their families without the burden of student loans, and it benefits industry in Alabama. Keep in mind that the state’s modest investment in each dual enrollment student is quickly returned, as they are likely to contribute economically in a short period of time.

The Alabama Community College System is requesting a $5 million increase for dual enrollment to further serve and invest in Alabama’s high school students. Before the Legislature’s spring break, the program had received only level funding from the Senate education committee, but with a long legislative road still ahead of the education budget, I remain hopeful that the program will receive its additional funding.

When I served in the Legislature, I considered funding proposals according to the state’s projected return on investment. For a program that so greatly benefits students, employers and the state, $5 million is a small price to pay.

Clark is president of Manufacture Alabama, a state trade association, chairman of Alabama’s Workforce Development Board and vice chairman of the Alabama Workforce Council.
Alabama's sudden Senate race: Who's in, who's out, and who's on the fence?

By: Paul Gattis

It's the hottest political conversation in Alabama right now.

Who is going to run for the U.S. Senate?

Some have declared themselves in the race. Some have already removed themselves from consideration. Some normally accessible politicians are taking the unusual step of not even responding to calls or text messages.

And some have a sense of humor about the whole thing.

"Yes, no, maybe, I don't know," is how state Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur, answered the phone Wednesday when a reporter's name popped up on his cell. Or at least some version of a non-answer like that which didn't even require a question.

It's what everybody's talking about.

What follows is what we know now.

They're running

Luther Strange has made it clear he would be a candidate for the seat long before Jeff Sessions left the Senate to become U.S. attorney general. He was appointed to the open seat in February by former Gov. Robert Bentley.

The special election for Sessions' seat was rescheduled Tuesday by Gov. Kay Ivey to December, which will be preceded by a primary election and possibly a runoff.

State Rep. Ed Henry, R-Hartselle, also threw his hat in the ring. Henry went from saying he would consider running on Tuesday afternoon to announcing he was in the race by early Tuesday evening. Henry is best known for leading the impeachment charge against Bentley and was co-chair of President Trump's Alabama campaign.

Nope, not running

U.S. Rep. Gary Palmer, R-Birmingham, is not a candidate. "At this time I'm not even thinking about a possible Senate run," Palmer said in a statement to AL.com. "I believe I am where I am supposed to be. I am focused on serving the people of the Sixth District and continuing to represent their views and values in Washington."

U.S. Rep. Martha Roby, R-Montgomery, interviewed with Bentley for consideration when Strange was appointed to the office. But she removed herself as a candidate Tuesday just hours after Ivey's announcement. According to spokesman Todd Stacy, "With her new committee assignments on Judiciary and Defense Appropriations, Rep. Roby is focused on growing the contributions she is making on behalf of Alabama's 2nd District in the House."

U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Saks, is also not considering a run, according to a campaign spokesperson.

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State Rep. Connie Rowe, R-Jasper, was also among the six finalists in February. But she said Tuesday that she won't be running for the Senate.

Maybe

U.S. Rep. Robert Aderholt, R-Haleyville, is considering it, according to chief of staff Brian Rell. Aderholt is in a powerful position in the House of Representatives and may not be eager to give that up. In his 20th year in Congress, he is in place to someday ascend to the chair of the powerful House Appropriations Committee, which directs how the federal government spends its money. Aderholt is the third senior-most Republican on the committee, and Alabama's senior-most member of the House.

U.S. Rep. Mo Brooks, R-Huntsville, is in Europe this week on congressional business and said by text message that he is "yet to ponder or decide anything." One possible advantage for Brooks: He's sitting on $1.2 million in campaign funds, which gives him a significant head start in the federal race that is for all practical purposes already underway.

Brooks, like any other congressman, can run for Senate this year and, if he isn't successful, still run for his House seat in 2018.

Perry Hooper Jr. was also among the six Bentley finalists in February. A former state legislator and co-chair, with Henry, of the Trump Alabama campaign, he told AL.com on Tuesday that he is considering a run and reiterated that with a press release Wednesday. Hooper said his sole objective as senator would be to promote the Trump agenda.

Del Marsh, president of the state Senate as the state now functions without a lieutenant governor, said he will make a decision this week on running for the U.S. Senate. He has served as president pro tem of the Senate since Republicans won the majority in the Senate in 2010.

Suspended Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore said at a Wednesday press conference that he will announce his plans next week. Moore is another possibility who has been the subject of speculation for both a Senate run as well as a gubernatorial campaign.

State Sen. Trip Pittman, R-Montrose, said he'll make a decision on whether to run "in a couple of weeks." Pittman commended Ivey for moving up the election. "As far as an opportunity (to run for the Senate seat), it's obviously a tremendous responsibility to seek that position of leadership and it's something I'm considering," he said. He submitted his name to Bentley for consideration for the appointment that went to Strange. Pittman is chair of the Senate Finance and Taxation General Fund committee.

Keeping quiet

Jim Byard Jr., the director of the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs, is not responding to media inquiries right now. He was among the six finalists when Bentley selected Strange and has long been thought to be a possible candidate for Senate or the 2018 governor's race.

State Sen. Bill Hightower, R-Mobile, has not responded to multiple phone messages left by AL.com. He also was among those Bentley considered before appointing Strange. He is chair of the Senate Constitution Ethics and Elections committee.
Orr, all joking aside, said he has received encouragement to run. He is chair of the Senate's education funding committee. "I have gotten a lot of calls and emails asking me to run," Orr said. "I believe there will be other candidates getting into the race that I could support. If that is the case, I will continue to focus on the job at hand in Montgomery."

U.S. Rep. Bradley Byrne, R-Fairhope, on Tuesday night also gave a cryptic response to AL.com about a Senate campaign. "I think Gov. Ivey made the right decision and I look forward to seeing the field."
From 1990 to 2003, researchers around the world — including some in Alabama — completed the Human Genome Project (HGP), an international, government-funded effort to identify and map all the genes that are included in human DNA. While the groundbreaking project successfully identified the locations and functions of each human gene, it was just the beginning of genomic medicine, a way of customizing medical care to a person’s unique genetic makeup.

Since the completion of the HGP, researchers have continued to study how a person’s genes affect his or her health. A great deal of groundbreaking work in that area is happening here in Alabama, led by the team at Huntsville’s HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology.

The HGP research showed that any two humans are identical in more than 99 percent of their genes. While humans have many more similarities with each other than differences, those slight variations in DNA can have a major impact on whether a person develops a particular disease, how he responds to an infection and which drugs are most effective, says Howard Jacob, Ph.D., HudsonAlpha’s executive vice president for medical genomics. At Hudson-Alpha, scientists have developed cutting-edge technology for DNA sequencing, the process of “reading somebody’s entire DNA,” Jacob says.

“Lots of people read little pieces of DNA, but we read the entire genome, which gives us all the information that shows what makes that person that person,” Jacob says. “Imagine building a house with a partial blueprint versus a full blueprint. By doing whole genome sequencing, we have all the information we may ever need to help in diagnosing or treating illnesses for that person.”

Whole genome sequencing is used in other places, but HudsonAlpha — with partners at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, the University of Alabama, the Auburn University School of Veterinary Medicine, the University of South Alabama’s Mitchell Cancer Institute and Children’s Hospital of Alabama — has developed technologies and methods for doing it for about the same costs as partial genome sequencing. And in Alabama, researchers and clinicians are using whole genome sequencing to make life-changing differences for current patients and the future of health care.

“For the first time in history, we are able to read nearly all the DNA bases that provide the blueprint of life,” says Shawn Levy, Ph.D., faculty investigator and founding director of the Genomic Services Laboratory at HudsonAlpha. “Every single living thing is based on the same fundamental building blocks, and the variations in size and content on their genomes creates the diversity of life. We now have the ability to read and compare those genomes and to bring those capabilities to improve human health care.”

Economic Impact of Genomic Medicine
Health care is big business, and the work happening at HudsonAlpha and its partner locations represents positive economic news for Alabama. HudsonAlpha-based scientists continue to discover new genetic markers associated with specific health conditions. For instance, researchers there discovered a new gene signature associated with triple negative breast cancer last year, which could lead to more targeted treatment for a devastating form of the disease.

But in addition to new genetic discoveries, HudsonAlpha has made strides in developing software that can process and decipher reams of genetic information, as well as hardware that can securely store and catalog loads of human genetic data. To that end, HudsonAlpha has assembled, in addition to genetic and clinical experts, a team of experts in accompanying fields, such as software development, informatics and information technology.

“When you sequence a genome, you derive a terabyte of information from each person,” says Liz Worthey, Ph.D., faculty investigator and director of software development and informatics at HudsonAlpha. “The challenge is to take all that data and make it useful.”

Worthey and her team have developed software that takes that data, aligning billions of pieces of an individual’s genome with reference data, and identifying all the places where that person is different from the standard.

“Most people have about 6 billion variances in their DNA, but many of those variances aren’t associated with disease; they just determine things like hair color and eye color,” Worthey says. The process of determining which variances could be associated with disease took about nine months, just a few years ago. Today, with the software Worthey has developed, the process takes about 90 minutes, and then the data is ready to be studied by a human expert.

Furthering its economic impact, HudsonAlpha also is helping to launch new startup companies such as Ploid Storage and Kailos Genetics, both of which are developing new technology to assist medical genomics and are located on the HudsonAlpha campus.

Health Impacts of Genomic Medicine

For the scientists and physicians who work in Alabama’s groundbreaking genomic medicine industry, economic impacts take second place to the impact of their work on human health. For instance, David Bick, M.D., spent 13 years as a professor at the Medical College of Wisconsin, where he also led a pediatric genetics clinic and a genomics lab, becoming a nationally recognized leader in the field of genomic medicine. He and a group of colleagues left Wisconsin in 2015 to join the faculty of HudsonAlpha because they saw a great opportunity to use whole genomic sequencing to make a positive impact on the health of more patients.

“HudsonAlpha has the most advanced sequencing instrument available in the world, the HiSEQX, which was a remarkable resource for the group of us in Wisconsin,” says Bick, who now serves as chief medical officer at HudsonAlpha and medical director of the Institute's Smith Family Clinic for Genomic Medicine, which opened in 2015. “HudsonAlpha had the sequencing technology, and we brought the informatics and the clinical knowledge to apply to that sequencing.”

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At the Smith Family Clinic, Bick and his team focus on using genome sequencing to diagnose diseases, especially in children, that have not been diagnosed through traditional avenues. Up to 10 percent of Americans have undiagnosed diseases, according to Jacob. Children may suffer from seizures, delayed development, intellectual disabilities or autism with no clear diagnosis.

“Some of the conditions are simply given names that are descriptions of the symptoms rather than a true diagnosis,” says Greg Cooper, Ph.D., faculty investigator at HudsonAlpha. “We receive a blood draw, perform whole genome sequencing, and map out every single piece of the DNA. We look for genetic changes in those children that might underlie the symptoms they have.”

About a quarter of the time, Bick and his team find the answer, he says. While that means many patients remain undiagnosed, “new gene-disease connections are being discovered all the time,” Bick says. “And once we have your genome, we continue to check against new research to find an answer. So if we don’t have a diagnosis this year, we may have one next year.”

As the whole genome sequencing center for the Undiagnosed Diseases Network, funded by the National Institutes of Health, HudsonAlpha receives cases from across the country. And HudsonAlpha has delivered diagnoses in more than 100 Alabama cases in the past few years, Levy says. For the families who receive concrete diagnoses, the sequencing work done here is life changing. While there may not be a cure for the genetic disease that is diagnosed, “there are strategies that can help,” Cooper says. “Many people experience improved medical management once they have a correct diagnosis.”

For instance, one young patient suffered from undiagnosed symptoms for several years, until genome sequencing at HudsonAlpha resulted in a diagnosis of Rett syndrome. “Now she sees one of the world’s leading physicians for treating Rett syndrome, and her family would have never known that’s who she needed to see until she got a proper diagnosis,” Cooper says.

In addition to helping achieve difficult diagnoses, genomic medicine has made great strides in pharmacogenomics, which is the analysis of key genes that dictate how a person metabolizes drugs. “Some people are, genetically, ultra-fast metabolizers of pain medication; therefore, they need to be given higher doses,” Levy says. “And some people’s genetics prevent them from responding at all to common drugs.”

In fact, up to 18 percent of drugs being taken today are being taken by people who can’t process them correctly, Jacob says. In his own case, Jacob’s genetic assay shows that “there are 50 common drugs I can’t process correctly,” he says.

Understanding how a person’s genetics affect his or her ability to process medicines can affect anesthesia and all types of treatments for various conditions. While a pharmacogenomics analysis, often referred to as PGX, is widely available for physician use, such tests are not yet widely used, Levy says. HudsonAlpha’s Smith Family Clinic now offers Insight Genome testing, which sequences the genomes of healthy people, allowing participants to learn about how (and whether) their body will respond to various drugs, and whether they are susceptible to

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contracting various genetic-related diseases. The Institute also adds each participant’s genome into its research program.

As the field of genetics continues to provide new knowledge and informed practice to the field of medicine, scientists and practitioners in Alabama remain on the cutting edge. And the people of Alabama, with access to the latest studies and care, will continue to benefit.
A vision fulfilled

Cathy Randall poses for a portrait in her home in Tuscaloosa on April 20. The University of Alabama is honoring Randall by naming the Honors College computer research program after her. [GARY COSBY JR./STAFF PHOTO]

Computer-based honors program will bear Cathy Randall's name

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Cathy Randall came to the University of Alabama in the late 1960s as a freshman who was among the first students in the university's pioneering computer-based honors program.

Almost 50 years later, Randall, the longtime director of the program, recalled a note from her father as she considered colleges.

"Dear Cathy, you need to look into this. Computers are going to be everywhere," Randall's father wrote.

Randall rediscovered the brief message looking through her student files as director.

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of the program.

“I am so grateful to my father to have the vision to see this,” she said.

The university is renaming the Computer-Based Honors Program, a component of the Honors College, the Catherine J. Randall Research Scholars Program, in part, because of her role as a visionary leader. The resolution for the name change also noted the philanthropic contributions and support of the university by her family.

Randall, who earned her bachelor's degree, two master's degrees and two doctoral degrees from UA, was director from 1980 to 2004.

The college was approached by students about the name change, according to Dean Shane Sharpe. The students expressed concerns that the current name was no longer adequately descriptive of the program, he said. With the widespread use of computers, it could be confused for an online program or one reserved for computer science majors, he said.

“It’s really a research program that applies computers,” he said.

The undergraduate research program partners students with researchers and cutting-edge computing technology to complete research projects. Students are expected to be more than just lab assistants.

“We want students actually engaged in the knowledge creation process,” Sharpe said.

Randall’s first project was working for a political science teacher who was convinced that then-Gov. George Wallace had a voting bloc in the legislature. The professor wanted to analyze the voting by lawmakers using cluster analysis, she said. Randall and others helped feed information about the votes by lawmakers into computers that filled up rooms. The students went through an accelerated course to learning computers before spending their last three years assisting with research.

“To get a chance to work on it as a 19-year-old, was, to use today's vernacular, awesome,” Randall said.

Renaming the program after Randall seemed the natural thing to do.

“Much to Cathy’s credit, there was overwhelming support from alumni to rename it in her honor. I think that speaks volumes,” Sharpe said.

Sharpe called Randall a visionary leader who helped shape the program.

“I think she is a fantastic example for our students. She lives a life of distinction. She sets a high bar for excellence,” Sharpe said.

UA President Stuart Bell praised Randall as a tireless ambassador for the program and university.

“It is entirely fitting that this program be named after someone whose work has allowed it to flourish and whose passion not only for this program, but this university, has left an indelible mark on so many of our students,” Bell said.

The name change was approved by the board of trustees earlier this month. It will be officially renamed as part of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the program next year, though there is no date currently for when the name change will take place, Sharpe said.

Reflecting on the honor, Randall focused on how the university influenced and shaped the lives in her family.

“The university is just a huge part of the Randall family’s life,” she said.
WALK OF FAME

Fans, players celebrate tradition

Ceremony honor UA's 2016 team captains

By Drew Taylor
Staff Writer

Alabama football has played a big part in the Freemans' lives.
Gary and Jeanae Freeman first met during a blind date on Sept. 13, 1986, when the Crimson Tide played Southern Miss at Legion Field in Birmingham. Not long after, the two were married.

Now, the Birmingham residents attend every home game and have a daughter who attended the University of Alabama. Hours before the annual A-Day Game on Saturday, the Freemans made it to Tuscaloosa again to celebrate four of the Crimson Tide's 2016 team captains during the Walk of Fame ceremony at Denny Chimes.

The Freemans were among

SEE TRADITION, AS
TRADITION

Continued from A1

a couple of hundreds of fans who honored Jonathan Allen, Reuben Foster, Eddie Jackson and Cam Robinson as they had their hands and feet imprinted into concrete. The captains joined dozens of past players who have been memorialized in the ground, a tradition that started in 1947 with quarterback Harry Gilmer being the first honoree.

“We want to show that we still support them,” Gary Freeman said.

Jeanae Freeman was excited to see Eddie Jackson, a safety who suffered a season-ending injury against Texas A&M last season when he broke his leg. For Jeanae Freeman, Jackson was just as effective on the sidelines as he was on the field.

“After all he went through, he was still a leader on this team,” she said. “He did a wonderful job.”

During his brief statement to the crowd, Jackson thanked the fans for their support throughout his career.

“You guys stood by my side and kept up my confidence,” Jackson said. “You never left me or lost faith in me, so I just want to thank you and Roll Tide.”

For Joe Lyle, a 1968 UA graduate, going to the Walk of Fame was an opportunity to witness history.

“They were probably the best players that their respective positions that we have ever had,” Lyle said.

Lyle said the Walk of Fame was a testament to the commitment fans have to the players that have made the Crimson Tide great over the years.

“It’s something that sets us apart from other people,” he said.

Many of the players took the opportunity to meet fans and sign autographs before and after the ceremony. Foster walked to the barricade at one point to meet a fan dressed as Spider-Man with a Barna jersey.

“It was such a blessing to be part of this family,” Foster said.

Others, such as Robinson, took a moment to say how much he would miss all of them.

“I’m going to miss this so much, the way you all supported us, week in and week out, through thick and thin,” Robinson said. “You are the best fans in the world.”

Alabama head coach Nick Saban said each captain had represented the university well over their careers.

“I’m very proud of them,” Saban said. “I wish them success and luck in their future endeavors, whether it’s in football or out of football because they have been great ambassadors for the University of Alabama and I hope they will continue to do that.”

Surrounded by names of past Alabama players, there were both clear and faded over the years, Allen said he was thankful for his time at UA.

“I’m just glad to be part of history at Alabama,” he said.

As he left to go to the game, Foster and other signed autographs for fans, including Jamie Causey.

“You guys legit mean so much to me,” Causey said. “You have no idea.”

—Reach Drew Taylor at drew.taylor@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0204.
Alumni couple donates $5 million

Gift will fund pre-med, arts initiatives

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

An player coach Paul W. Bryant's 1964 national championship football team and his wife have donated more than $5 million to the University of Alabama. The donation will be used to establish a premedical scholars program and an exhibition for current students and alumni.

"This is a very exciting day for the University of Alabama and the College of Arts and Sciences," Dean Robert Olin said. "This gift has a broad purpose."

The endowment will establish the Dr. E. Gaylon McCollough Institute for Pre-Medical Scholars and the Susan N. McCollough Art Biennale. Both McColloughs are alumni of UA. The gift was officially announced on Friday at the university with the McColloughs joined by UA President Stuart Bell.

Dr. Gaylon McCollough on Friday announces the $5 million gift that will establish the Dr. E. Gaylon McCollough Institute for Pre-Medical Scholars and the Susan N. McCollough Art Biennale. Both McColloughs are UA alumni.
Gaylon McCollough is a 1965 UA honors graduate and academic All-American who went on to become prominent facial plastic surgeon. He is president and CEO of McCollough Plastic Surgery Clinic and founder of the McCollough Institute for Appearance and Health in Gulf Shores. His wife, Susan Nomberg McCollough is an internationally-acclaimed abstract and impressionistic artist.

"I realize it is truly rare that a family gets an opportunity to partner with its alma mater to establish a program that potentially has lasting impact on humanity," Gaylon McCollough said.

The institute must still be approved by the UA System board of trustees, which is scheduled to consider a proposal at its June meeting. If approved, the first class of students would be in 2019.

The institute will help the university develop a premier pre-medical education program combining a liberal arts education with leadership and management skills, Olin and Gaylon McCollough said.

"This will be a significant advancement to the pre-medical education," UA President Stuart Bell said.

Details such as curriculum and where the students will reside as a living-learning community are still being worked out, Olin said.

A search for a director for the institute will start soon, Olin and Bell said.

The curriculum would be part of a pre-med minor in the college, Olin said. While it will be located in the College of Arts and Sciences, Olin hopes it will grow to involve every college at the university.

The curriculum will focus on academic excellence, applied analytics, leadership, community service, scholarly research and ethical professionalism, according to the release.

Gaylon McCollough’s vision for the program is a focused curriculum that could become a new paradigm for pre-medical education, a course of study that will better prepare the pre-medical students for medical school and careers afterward.

The McColloughs, through a previous gift, had established the McCollough Medical Scholars Forum for pre-medical students. The institute would grow the program beyond a weekend to a yearlong experience for students.

Participants will be able to live with a cohort of students with similar interests in living-learning communities. Admissions will be limited to 40 per year with a maximum of 160 students in the program at one time. The small size of the cohorts will allow for concentrated mentoring.

The mentoring is important for pre-med students, Gaylon McCollough said. On Friday, he reflected on mentors during his career, such as Bryant.

"Not a day goes by that I don't think about coach Bryant," he said.

The program will allow the faculty to get to know their students better, he said. The relationship is important because Gaylon McCollough believes it will help the students become better doctors and improve their relationships with patients.

"You will see doctors that understand themselves and their patient better," Gaylon McCollough predicted.

The Susan N. McCollough Art Biennale will be a contemporary art exhibition every two years that showcases the art of leading professionals alongside emerging and alumni artists.

The biennial show will offer current and former students a chance to showcase their work, Olin said.

The exhibition will give current students a chance to interact with older artists and show their work, Gaylon McCollough said.

Details for the show are still being developed, Gaylon McCollough said. He predicted it would be two to three years until it began.

"This will be an opportunity. This is something that is very important to support. This will be a place where students can display their work," Gaylon McCollough said.
THE STADIUM DEBATE

IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME

Magic City needs to go big with BJCC sports venue

An NFL or NBA franchise in Birmingham might sound foolhardy, but it's an idea worth pursuing, according to Birmingham Mayor William Bell.

Last Sunday, Bell played the role of local dignitary at the place in Birmingham that might provide a vision for how to bring major professional sports to downtown. The mayor waved the green flag to begin the eighth annual Honda Indy Grand Prix of Alabama at Barber Motorsports Park, and afterwards talked about bringing more sporting events to the city. George Barber had a crazy vision for a race track out in the woods near Leeds, and now that track is considered one of the nicest facilities of its kind in the world. It's proof remarkable things can happen in the unlikeliest of places with a little imagination and willpower.

Joseph Goodman
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It seems like talk of a new downtown stadium has been going on for decades. Maybe a definitive answer be coming soon? That remains to be seen, but here are two renderings from the past few years that show what a BJCC stadium could look like. File photos
GOODMAN

FROM A1

Can Barber's success be applied to other projects in Birmingham, and on a grander scale? There are many in Birmingham who want to believe it can with the construction of a downtown sports venue. Whether or not that should — or even could — take the form of time spent pursuing inclusion in the NFL or NBA is debatable, but there's nothing wrong with Alabama's largest city thinking big, and planning for a better future.

Moments after walking off the starting grid of the Grand Prix of Alabama, Bell spoke about the city's plan to attract more sporting events to Birmingham. On the cusp of announcing final plans to build a new stadium or dome downtown, Birmingham and its city leaders are starting to think big again. In his trackside interview with AL.com, Mayor Bell entertained a conversation about pro sports in Birmingham, but before we delve into that fantasy, let's not forget what really matters to a town that created the Iron Bowl and SEC championship game and still hosts the Magic City Classic.

College football is king in Birmingham, and it played a large role in shaping the modern game fans love today. With the right vision and leadership, it can be that force again. There was a time when the city called itself the Football Capital of the South, and people actually believed it. Can Birmingham recreate that image, and, if so, where to begin? These are the questions city and county leaders should be asking themselves.

Additional college football bowls and neutral-site kickoff classics featuring marquee teams are a natural fit for this city, but hosting college football national championships should be the goal. If Tampa, Florida — a college football outpost — can host a national championship, so, too, can Birmingham with the right downtown facility.

Could you imagine the type of collective support Birmingham as a region would throw at a college football national championship? It would be like the Mardi Gras of football.

"My goal as mayor has always been to make Birmingham an outstanding athletic venue regardless of whether it's professional, college or amateur," Bell said. "We want to attract people to this area."

Then it's time to get started.

SPORTS TOWN

In addition to a college football national championship, a dome or complete overhaul to Legacy Arena would allow the BJCC to once again bid on NCAA regionals and men's and women's Final Fours. UAB will be a permanent tenant at the new facility, of course, but there are people in Birmingham who feel like the city is ready for more. With financing for a new downtown venue close to finalization, the mayor indicated entities tied to the city are also reaching out to professional leagues.

"We have feelers out there for both NBA and NFL," Bell said. "We know that there is a lot of work that has to go into it, we know that there has to be a lot of financial commitment for it, but we do have feelers out there to see how far we can push it, to see if we can make it a reality."

Birmingham is a great sports town. That's an undisputed fact. But can it support a major pro team? With the right venue, and fostered by the correct environment, the mayor believes it can, and so do a lot of other influential people who want to see the city succeed and grow.

The multiple agencies and governments involved with the BJCC have been wrestling over the construction of either an open-air stadium, or a dome. The mayor and city council want a dome. An open-air stadium would be cheaper and faster to build.

"We're still in the final process of trying to close that final gap in the financing of it," Bell said. "We're still looking at how we can use that public-private collaboration to close the amount of money that we have to have on an annual basis to cover the debt service. We're close to it, but we're not quite there yet. But we're working very diligently on it."

The people of this city have heard about domes and stadiums for so long, I know it's hard to really believe, but the mayor assured me, "It's going to happen."

"It's just a matter of timing," Bell said.
Dome or open-air stadium, here’s the bottom line on whatever is built: It needs to be innovative and visionary, and rival not only the best venues in the country, but the world. Anything short of that will be a waste of money.

Don’t build something to attract third-tier bowl games, afterthought conventions and minor-league franchises. Build something with a world-class vision that will attract world-class investors to this city.

Don’t build something that represents where we are as a city right now. Build something that represents where we want to be as a city in the next 10 and 20 years.

It seems unlikely right now that Birmingham could lure a major pro team, but that doesn’t mean it couldn’t happen in the future under the right circumstances. Here’s something I do know: If Birmingham ever landed a major pro team, it would be well supported and successful. Why? It’s simple. Because people who live in Birmingham love the city, and want to support it and see it succeed. We’ve been through a lot together, and we’re better for it despite what outside naysayers might say.

Birmingham is a city crying out for its leaders to bring it together, and they’re finally starting to listen.

Sports teams foster some of this country’s best expressions of civic pride. Statewide, Alabamians rallied around college football when we didn’t have much else. That’s worked out.

Birmingham helped turn the Alabama Crimson Tide into what it is today, and the city has supported the Barons for over 100 years. The Birmingham Black Barons were once the preeminent Negro League franchise in the South.

Pro football teams have been well supported here in the past only to have their leagues fold.

The UAB football team will make the downtown venue its new home, but landing other permanent tenants is a priority. If Barber Motorsports Park has taught the city anything, it’s that if you pump your heart and soul into something, then good things will happen.

“The great thing about it is George had a vision, but he also knew there had to be a public-private collaboration in order to make it happen,” Bell said.

This city will come together for college football. Reclaiming the title as Football Capital of the South is a starting point, and a way for the city to prove itself on a national scale. Where it goes from there isn’t up to politicians or city leaders, but the people.

Joseph Goodman is a columnist for Alabama Media Group. He’s on Twitter @JoeGoodmanJr.

College football is king in Birmingham, and it played a large role in shaping the modern game fans love today. With the right vision and leadership, it can be that force again.
UAB football coach Bill Clark lauds program's progress, looks to new stadium

By: Jesse Chambers

Bill Clark, head football coach at UAB, told an audience at the Harbert Center downtown on Wednesday, April 27, that his program badly needs the new downtown stadium that is being planned to supplant an aging Legion Field.

Clark said that he had told Mayor William Bell and other officials that people in the football program are not that concerned about the particular type of stadium that gets built.

“We don't care if it's a dome or open air,” he said. “We just need a stadium.”

Clark offered his remarks at an annual luncheon fundraiser for Firehouse Shelter downtown, including the nonprofit’s current capital campaign to raise money for a badly needed new facility to replace its current 110-year-old building.

The coach, whose team will take the field at Legion Field on September 2 after a two-year hiatus in the program, also touted the virtues of UAB and a recently resurgent Birmingham, discussed some of the virtues and life lessons that he and his staff seek to instill in Blazer players and talked about the importance of the Firehouse and its work with the homeless.

'Blessed to live in Birmingham'

Clark celebrated the city -- “You don’t know how blessed we are to live in Birmingham” -- and the university, which is in the midst of a construction boom.

He said he is trying to use this sense of momentum in the city to feed his reborn program.

“There are some great things going on at UAB and some great things going on in the city, and I’ve been selling that,” he said. “That’s why we are recruiting so well.”

He offered what he called some “behind-the-scenes” insight into the rebirth of the UAB football program, which was axed in late 2014 and sat idle in 2015 and 2016.

Prominent Birmingham realtor Tommy Brigham called Clark in May 2015 on behalf of some a group of local business people and Blazer supporters to assess his interest in returning as Blazer head coach, the coach told attendees.

“He said, ‘We will get involved if you tell us you will get involved,’ Clark said.

“There was a pause... a long pause,” Clark said, referring to his hesitancy at the time, drawing laughs from the crowd of at least 200 people.

Finally, Clark gave Brigham the answer he was hoping for.
“I said, ‘I’ll get involved if you give me your word that this will be done right,’” he said.

Brigham agreed, and the program was on its way to resuscitation.

Fundraising for football ‘a big deal’

The program has since raised about $43 million, according to Clark. “That’s a big deal,” he said.

“In addition to having major-league university and -- I think -- the greatest city in America, and now we have the facilities,” Clark said, referring the programs new practice fields, weight room and other amenities.

“We’ve gone from some of the worst facilities in America to some of the best,” he said.

Clark said that after securing those on-campus facilities, the next step for the program is to see the construction of a stadium.

He said that UAB is also planning to create a “world-class” sports medicine program, building on such assets as the school’s nutrition sciences program. “That’s coming,” he said.

‘Not playing to lose’ in 2017

During a brief question and answer session, Clark declined to predict his team’s won-loss record for the upcoming season.

“But we are not playing to lose,” he said, who added that the team’s goal each year will be to win a conference championship.

And the Blazer players are confident, according to Clark. “These guys are expecting to win,” he said.

Clark was asked why he decided to stay in Birmingham and said there were “a ton of factors” involved.

One factor was the potential he saw in the program even before he entered the college coaching ranks at Jacksonville State University, according to Clark. “As a high school coach, I saw what UAB could be,” he said.

He said he was also impressed by the UAB backers he met and how they fought passionately to restore the program. And there was “faith in the Lord, a wife who was happy in Birmingham,” he said. “It kind of all worked together.”

'Going beyond football'
Clark said that the Blazer program seeks to instill important life values in players, “things that go beyond football.”

The players are taught to put the team before themselves; to be prepared to do good work on the field, at practice and in the classroom; and to avoid “whining, complaining and excuses,” the coach said.

They are also taught to seek to be known for enthusiasm, great effort and showing respect to all people, according to Clark.

Clark and his players recently volunteered to serve a meal at Firehouse, and the coach said they will continue the relationship. “UAB football will be involved, since they are just blocks from our campus,” he said.

“For whatever reason, (the homeless) are in the situation they’re in, and we have to help them,” Clark said.

'Dire straits'

Attendees also heard from Firehouse shelter client Syd Love, a U.S. Army veteran originally from Center Point, who offered his testimony about the way the facility’s transitional housing program has helped him escape homelessness.

Love said he became disabled in 2013, then found himself on the streets after refusing what he said was substandard V.A. housing in dangerous neighborhoods.

“Without the Firehouse, I would have been in dire straits,” he said.

'A scary time for nonprofits'

Firehouse director Anne Wright Rygiel discussed how much the organization needs a new, larger facility, especially in a “scary time for nonprofits” when government funding is going down.

She said that on any given night in Birmingham, there are about 1,200 homeless men and women, but that there are only 528 beds available in local emergency shelters.

Meanwhile, rents in the booming City Center continue to go up, making matters even more difficulty for the working poor to find housing, according to Rygiel.

She also expressed part of the vision of the Firehouse, which served about 5,000 men, women and children last year.

“Everyone has the ability to change and be successful,” she said.
After a brief illness, Dr. Virginia D. Gauld (Jenny) was returned to the Lord on March 14, 2017. She was an inspiration to all she met and encouraged everyone around her to strive to reach their full potential. Jenny was a passionate supporter of her family, her Church, the YWCA, The University of Alabama at Birmingham, and Atlanta Braves baseball.

She graduated from Emory with a Bachelor's Degree in education and later earned a Master's Degree in Rehabilitation Counseling and a PhD in Higher Education Administration from the University of Alabama. Dr. Gauld was the first female Vice President at UAB where she was the VP for Student Affairs. She was a fierce defender of the students and was instrumental in recruiting a broader minority and non-traditional population for the University. The now common practice of early admission to the UAB Medical School was the brainchild of Dr. Gauld.

Jenny joined the board of the YWCA in Birmingham in 1986 and remained very involved with the YW throughout her career and in retirement. In 1990 she became the first Board President that worked outside the home. During her 30+ year tenure much change evolved in the YWCA and its Family Violence Program is now one of the most diverse programs in the state, providing domestic violence services and intervention.

When Jenny retired from UAB and moved to Pell City she also expanded the YWCA shelter services for Blount and St Clair counties. In 1996 and then in again in 2006 she co-chaired two very successful capital campaigns that together raised closed to 30 million dollars. She was the first co-chair of the YWCA's Purse and Passion luncheon in downtown Birmingham in 2000 and brought that very successful model to St Clair county for the domestic violence shelter in Pell City. She was honored in 2014 at Birmingham Purse and Passion.

The number of honors and awards Dr. Gauld has received over her lifetime are too many to name. Her life was lived in service to others and her giving spirit cannot be over-estimated. She was a member of Leadership Birmingham and Leadership Alabama and was voted Citizen of the Year in Pell City. Included in the many Boards Dr. Gauld served are the Board of Directors for the Rotary Club of Pell City, and the Pell City Housing Authority, the Board of Directors of the National Antique Automobile Club of America, Library and Research Center. She also held many leadership positions at First United Methodist Church in Pell City. Her life of service was an attestation to her deep faith and desire to be a living example of the great commandment to love God and neighbor.

Jenny was loved by many far and wide and will be deeply missed. She was predeceased by her parents, JR Davis and Gladys Holland Davis, and her son, Richard Weston Gauld. She is survived by her husband of 40 years, Ernest W. Gauld, and her children Deborah Gauld Lofton (Murray), Lee Franklin Shafer (Tom), James B. Gauld (Anne), Donson N. Franklin (Cecile) Lisa Gauld Anglin (Travis), eleven grandchildren and one great-grandchild. A memorial service will be held to honor the life of Dr. Virginia D. Gauld on April 29th at 2 p.m. at the Beacon, First United Methodist Church, 2200 3rd Ave. North, Pell City, AL 35215. Gifts in memorial may be given to the YWCA, www.ywcabham.org.
Toyota donates $150,000 toward improving female STEM involvement

By: Travis Leder

Huntsville engine maker Toyota is making a contribution toward a summer camp focused on keeping female students interested in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

The automobile company's Toyota USA Foundation is providing a $150,000 grant to support and grow Tech Trek. The camp is only for rising eighth-grade girls, and the week-long program provides participants hands-on STEM-based activities.

Tech Trek is an American Association of University Women (AAUW) program hosted at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. UAH has hosted Tech Trek since 2014, and dozens of female students participate annually.

"Interest in Tech Trek has grown in the three years we have been holding the camp," says Dr. Rhonda Gaede, camp director and associate professor of electrical and computer engineering at UAH. "Increasing the number of counties served and selecting a group of campers who reflect the demographics of the state are priorities in our fourth year."

Tech Trek cost students $50 last year, and the grant will help provide financial assistance for students who may not be able to afford to participate.
UAH taxation expert says Trump tax plan could push up interest rates

By: Jack Madison

HUNTSVILLE, AL (WAFF) -

President Donald Trump's tax cut plan that rolled out Tuesday includes reducing corporate tax rate to 15 percent. That includes all pass through businesses, which would see the rate knocked down from as much as 39.6 percent.

The idea is to increase economic growth by cutting taxes for business owners who, with more money to spend, can then add workers or expand.

"It'd be a really, really significant tax cut if that income goes down from 39.6 percent to 15 percent. People have more money to spend, they spend. And a restaurant can hire more employees. They can add on an addition with that additional money," said Charlie Hickman, who is clinical associate professor of taxation at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

Hickman added that the problem comes if lost tax revenue forces the federal government to borrow more money, resulting in higher interest rates that could hamper economic growth.

"Then it becomes more difficult for everyone to borrow. So if the government starts borrowing an additional half-trillion dollars a year, then that sucks a half-trillion dollars out of the credit market, and that makes loans more difficult to get, means interest rates go up. And if interest rates go up, then the rate the federal government pays on the national debt goes up," Hickman said.

He said he is confident there will be tax-cut package passed in some form.
What's stopping you from pursuing your startup dream?

By: Kathryn Rickmeyer

Starting your own business is a great thing, perhaps the greatest of things. It's a blessing that it's becoming more approachable. So in this burgeoning era "startups", what's stopping people from starting-up?

I sat down with Brandon Kruse, a true entrepreneur who founded his first company before he was 15. He now manages the data for the Hudson Alpha Institute for Biotechnology, and is investing in others through Huntsville West, to figure out what's stopping people.

**Failure**

Failure. It's imminent. It's part of the process. Every business article known to man has boasted the virtues of failure, so why does failure frighten people?

People's fear of failure lies in breaking their chains of security.

Chain #1: Money-the almighty dollar. Many leave stable middle class incomes requiring them to sacrifice their creature comforts. Money is like gas on a trip. You don't want to run out of gas, but you also aren't taking a tour of gas stations.

Chain #2: Time -People say they "don't have time" or an idea would "take so much time" or it would be "a long time before it comes to fruition." But it's not about having time, it's about making time. It means relinquishing things from the non-essential time binge watching Scandal, to the more treasured times with family.

Kruse says, "It's also important to point out that you don't ever pass the point of failure. If anything, the failures get bigger." There is no "magic sauce" you figure out after one successful business that guarantees every other business you have afterwards will be successful.

**Paralysis of analysis**

Matt Jones, Executive Director at Rocket Hatch says, "The difference between a "wantrepreneur" and an entrepreneur is execution." Taking Action. We've all had "million dollar ideas", but that's just what they are - ideas. You don't put ideas on a resume.
Society has been conditioned to a "spoon fed lifestyle." In high school, students must raise their hand to go to the bathroom, but after graduation, people are expected to know what they want to do for the rest of their life. It's overwhelming, it's scary. It's honestly a little insane. The same is said in starting a business. An aspiring entrepreneur, so many times, goes from working a 9-5 job, with clear-cut tasks, strict deadlines, and quantitative feedback -- to having to figure out when and how much to work, what they need to do, and what's working. It's overwhelming, but just like going from asking to go to the bathroom to figuring out the rest of your life- it's not about getting caught up in the "How-to's", it's about facing the fear.

Kruse challenges anybody with a great idea to set a calendar reminder in their phone for 1 year from today and after one year see what they have done with their idea. Many just get an alert on their phone after one year and realize nothing more has happened. Then there are those who, after 1 year, have a business plan, but have not made the first sale. Then there are the do'ers -- the ones killing it in business.

It's not about having the perfect business or all the right pieces of the puzzle, or the right market, or the right time. It's about doing it.

**Capital as a crutch**

The argument: You have to spend money to make money. But what so many get caught up on is thinking they have to raise "X" amount of dollars before they can even start a business. The thought of raising capital is daunting but Kruse says,

"Think about some of the best businesses: Amazon, Nike, Microsoft. What do they all have in common? They started "lean" in garages and basements. They grew and metamorphized as their business grew. Amazon in Jeff Bezos' garage, Nike in Phil Knight's trunk of his car, Microsoft started by pitching a product (a BASIC interpreter) before they even built it."

Thanks to a bevy of technology - included but not limited to: YouTube, Kickstarter, Facebook, GoFundMe, the excuses for not being able to raise funds, reach customers, and have a business are nearly extinct. The "Coolest Cooler", a cooler featuring a blender, Bluetooth speaker, USB charger, and a bottle opener raised over $13,285,226 on Kickstarter. Take a local, more finite level: Discount Divas, started at Huntsville West, does $800 thousand in revenue a month, and their business? Selling women's clothing online, and it's done all through Facebook. Discount Divas did not raise a dollar of capital to start their business.

Kruse says, "Investment in larger capital markets is extremely efficient. If you have a company that is investable-people will invest."

So, if you are part of the 37 percent of people who want to start their own business and get past the excuses. Remember this advice:
Find your first customer

Kruse says, "Your product or service has no value until it has generated revenue." Finding your first customer validates your assumptions: the assumption you even have a business.

Your first customers are going to give you the 411 on what's a hit and what's a miss. Listen to them early and often.

And when you ask for their advice and feedback, listen. Don't be an "Askhole," someone who asks for advice and doesn't utilize it.

Self-awareness

People have preached relentlessly "Grow your weaknesses." Brandon Kruse says "Double down and grow your strengths." Focus on what you are naturally gifted at and go from good to great.

Kruse says, "Another important lesson in self-awareness, is knowing how you will respond to criticism. The line all young entrepreneurs are bound to hear is "9/10 of Businesses will fail". To me, that just means I need to start 10 businesses." Knowing how you will respond to criticism-how it will affect you going forward in your business- is the difference between business life and death. Kruse references, Sara Blakely, the founder of Spanx. Blakely was a year into the process before she told anyone about it because she knew she wouldn't go through with it if she heard the criticism. Instead of defending or explaining her idea- she was doing it.

The wingman

Failing sucks. Really it does. I could rattle off a catchy cliché to make it sound better - but those 2 words sum it up.

Don Draper said it cynically, but his message rings true in the world of startups "Peggy, I'm glad this is an environment where you feel free to fail."

Find a wingman. Create an environment you feel free to fail in.

I asked Jones, "What makes a good wingman?" Jones says, "Think about what makes a good friend. They call you on your crap, tell you the truth, understand what you are doing and encourage you even when it doesn't always make sense." Surround yourself with other entrepreneurs because while your business may be different, you are in the fight together. Kruse says, "More often than not, other entrepreneurs are facing or have faced similar difficulties-customer relationships, supply chain management, or recurring revenue." They may be masked differently but many of the core obstacles are still the same.
However, many entrepreneurs receive advice from people who have never started a business. Kruse responds you wouldn't take medical advice from someone who wasn't a nurse or a doctor, nor should you give medical advice if you are not a medical professional. The same is said in starting up, don't take advice from someone who has never started one, and don't give advice if you have never started one.

Where do you find great wingmen? Kruse's Huntsville West is a sanctuary for business pioneers and wingmen. Why? Because in transforming the former school into the start up incubator, Brandon asked himself, "What would I have wanted when I was starting up?" Huntsville West provides everything from Wi-Fi, to cool collaboration spaces, the opportunity to pick the minds of genius entrepreneurs, and yes even free coffee. Global communication companies, international entertainment corporations, and fresh local businesses call Huntsville West home. That's where the magic lies, in the collaboration, of experienced entrepreneurs like Brandon to the youthful ambition of those just starting. Huntsville West is dedicated to connecting, educating, and inspiring young businesses and entrepreneurs. Huntsville West houses a special program, Rocket Hatch, to fuel and accelerate the "startup ecosystem." The program is providing one-on-one mentoring, interactive training, peer-to-peer support, on-demand problem solving, roundtable discussions, and social mixers.
NASA's Fermi catches gamma-ray flashes from tropical storms

By: Staff Writers

About a thousand times a day, thunderstorms fire off fleeting bursts of some of the highest-energy light naturally found on Earth. These events, called terrestrial gamma-ray flashes (TGFs), last less than a millisecond and produce gamma rays with tens of millions of times the energy of visible light. Since its launch in 2008, NASA's Fermi Gamma-ray Space Telescope has recorded more than 4,000 TGFs, which scientists are studying to better understand how the phenomenon relates to lightning activity, storm strength and the life cycle of storms.

Now, for the first time, a team of NASA scientists has analyzed dozens of TGFs launched by the largest and strongest weather systems on the planet: tropical storms, hurricanes and typhoons. A paper describing the research was published March 16 in the Journal of Geophysical Research: Atmospheres.

"One result is a confirmation that storm intensity alone is not the key factor for producing TGFs," said Oliver Roberts, who led the study at the University College Dublin, Ireland, and is now at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama. "We found a few TGFs were made in the outer rain bands of major storms, hundreds of kilometers from the powerful eye walls at their centers, and one weak system that fired off several TGFs in a day."

Scientists suspect TGFs arise from the strong electric fields near the tops of thunderstorms. Under certain conditions, these fields become strong enough to drive an "avalanche" of electrons upward at nearly the speed of light. When these accelerated electrons race past air molecules, their paths become deflected slightly. This change causes the electrons to emit gamma rays.

Fermi's Gamma-ray Burst Monitor (GBM) detects TGFs occurring within about 500 miles (800 kilometers) of the location directly beneath the spacecraft. In 2012, GBM scientists employed new techniques that effectively upgraded the instrument, increasing its sensitivity and leading to a higher rate of TGF detections.

This enhanced discovery rate helped the GBM team show that most TGFs also generate a strong pulse of very low frequency radio waves, signals previously attributed only to lightning. Facilities like the Total Lightning Network operated by Earth Networks in Germantown, Maryland, and the World Wide Lightning Location Network, a research collaboration run by the University of Washington in Seattle, can pinpoint lightning- and TGF-produced radio pulses to within 6 miles (10 km) anywhere on the globe.
"Combining TGF data from GBM with precise positions from these lightning detection networks has opened up our ability to connect the outbursts to individual storms and their components," said co-author Michael Briggs, assistant director of the Center for Space Plasma and Aeronomic Research at University of Huntsville (UAH).

The team studied 37 TGFs associated with, among other storms, typhoons Nangka (2015) and Bolaven (2012), Hurricane Paula (2010), the 2013 tropical storms Sonia and Emang and Hurricane Manuel, and the disturbance that would later become Hurricane Julio in 2014.

"In our study, Julio holds the record for TGFs, firing off four within 100 minutes on Aug. 3, 2014, another the day after, and then no more for the life of the storm," Roberts said. "Most of this activity occurred as Julio underwent rapid intensification into a tropical depression, but long before it had even become a named storm."

What the scientists have learned so far is that TGFs from tropical systems do not have properties measurably different from other TGFs detected by Fermi. Weaker storms are capable of producing greater numbers of TGFs, which may arise anywhere in the storm. In more developed systems, like hurricanes and typhoons, TGFs are more common in the outermost rain bands, areas that also host the highest lightning rates in these storms.

Most of the tropical storm TGFs occurred as the systems intensified. Strengthening updrafts drive clouds higher into the atmosphere where they can generate powerful electric fields, setting the stage for intense lightning and for the electron avalanches thought to produce TGFs.

TGFs were discovered in 1992 by NASA's Compton Gamma-Ray Observatory, which operated until 2000.

The Fermi Gamma-ray Space Telescope is an astrophysics and particle physics partnership managed by NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. Fermi was developed in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Energy, with important contributions from academic institutions and partners in France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Sweden and the United States.

The GBM Instrument Operations Center is located at the National Space Science Technology Center in Huntsville. The GBM team includes a collaboration of scientists from UAH, NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, the Max Planck Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics in Germany, University College Dublin in Ireland and other institutions.
We must protect even the hate speech we hate

Alabamians should be quite proud of the substantial progress that our state has made on the issue of racism.

Last Tuesday night, a speech was given at Auburn University by a man who proclaims he’s “dedicated to the heritage, identity and future of people of European descent in the United States.”

His speech was called ignorant, extremist and racist, and the tension it created caused the talk to be covered by national and even international media. It was canceled by school administrators, a federal court weighed in, an order was issued, and dueling demonstrations ensued. There were even a couple of nasty fist fights.

But if that same speech would have been delivered six decades ago, at the same location, it would have been called... Tuesday night.

Nobody would have noticed. Campus life would have moved along as if nothing controversial was being spoken inside that nondescript university building. and not a single reporter would have wasted their time covering something so commonplace as a little-known racist saying racist things somewhere in Alabama.

That’s undeniable progress, so good for you, Heart of Dixie.

On the other hand, the fact that so many people did notice — and moreover, that they responded so poorly — does present the millennial generation with an entirely different yet equally insidious threat to their freedoms: censorship.

Here’s how it went down: earlier this month Auburn University announced that it was canceling a speech scheduled to be delivered on campus by Richard Spencer, the aforementioned self-appointed champion of “people of European descent.”

“Auburn canceled the Richard Spencer event scheduled for Tuesday evening based on legitimate concerns and credible evidence that it will jeopardize the safety of students, faculty, staff and visitors,” the university said in a statement.

What a terrible lesson on the “heckler’s veto” to teach its students.

The university could have more honestly said, “Auburn canceled the First Amendment for Tuesday evening based on legitimate concerns and credible evidence that it will jeopardize the feelings of a few hecklers.”

Is our access to information — regardless of how controversial it may be — to be held hostage to someone’s feelings?

We’re seeing the same process unfold with alarming frequency across the nation: A speaker is invited to give a talk on campus about something that someone decides is provocative — it could be an issue that’s clearly racist, or something that’s fairly ordinary like comparative religion. Neither the seriousness of the subject nor the qualifications or behavior of its presenter matter much, only that someone is offended, or triggered, or made to feel things other than happiness.

Students whine. Faculty encourage. Administrators surrender. And speech is silenced.

Unpopular speakers may be chased away, but what’s left in their wake is a slightly weakened First Amendment, so who really loses?

Most people see Spencer’s ideas for what they are: racist rhetoric that has long since lost its traction with voters. Still, it’s understandable for decent people to want to keep him out or shout him down, but with each cancellation and every ill-mannered interruption, they sap the strength from their own rights.

Nowhere is this fact more eloquently explained than in the remarkable film, “A Man for All Seasons.” In it, the family of Thomas More implores him to have a certain ruthless and ambitious man arrested because they fear the man will eventually engineer his downfall. More refuses, saying that until the man actually breaks the law, he must go free even if he were the devil himself.

More’s son-in-law balks at the analogy, and says he’d chop down every law in England to get at the devil.

“And when the last law was down,” More responds, “and the devil turned on you ... where would you hide ... the laws all being flat? This country is planted with laws from coast to coast. Man’s laws, not God’s. And if you cut them down ... do you really think you could stand upright in the winds that would blow then?”

More ends, “I’d give the devil benefit of law for my own safety’s sake.”

So, yes, Auburn. We must give Richard Spencer the benefit of the First Amendment for our own freedom’s sake. Besides, his speech was kind of boring, anyway.

Bryars, who grew up in Mobile and lives in Huntsville, is a conservative columnist for AL.com.
The Stillman College board of trustees has selected interim leader Cynthia Warrick to be the next permanent president of the small private college.

Warrick succeeded Peter Millet as president in January. The board began the search last spring after Millet announced plans to step down.

"It is my great honor and privilege to serve as the seventh president of Stillman College. We will continue to uphold the traditions and standards of the college while advancing new initiatives that support our mission, the community, the state and the nation," Warrick said in a statement released by the college.

Warrick assumes the permanent role as the college faces ongoing financial challenges. In March, she reached out to alumni to help raise roughly $2 million to cover debt service and operating expenses during the summer and help boost recruiting efforts to draw new students.

Last fall, board chairman Dennis Drive said Stillman’s next leader would face a series of challenges including improving the college’s finances, energizing alumni and rallying community support.

The board also announced the addition of five new members who will begin serving in July. The board elected Devarieste Curry, a Washington, D.C. attorney; alumnus Leonard Duff, superintendent of Pickens County Schools; Charles Durham, the retired pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Tuscaloosa; Driver as chairman and Hargrove, a former counsel and General Motors Co. executive; and Samory Pruitt, vice president for community affairs at the University of Alabama.

Evelyn Jenkins Gunn, Ann Lavender Simmons and Tracy Rosser rotated off the board, becoming emeriti members.

The board re-elected Driver as chairman and selected Sarah Harte as vice chairwoman and Melissa Davis as secretary.

Reach Ed Enoch at 205-722-0209 or ed.enoch@tuscaloosanews.com.
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH ALABAMA

College gets first Fulbright winner

By Jennifer Edwards
TimesDaily

FLORENCE — Mollie Schaefer could not read until she was 9 years old. The youngest of six siblings watched as her family members amassed shelves full of books and cultivated a love of reading. At that time, she could not read a menu and could hardly spell her name. The closest she got to reading a children’s book was reciting the words she memorized from being read to by her mother.

“That involved a lot of humiliation and self-doubt,” Schaefer said. “A big thing about dyslexia is dyslexic people have big minds that can understand a lot of big ideas.

“One of my mom’s favorite stories about me was when I was about the age of 4. I was sitting in our minivan and looked out the window and said, ‘But mom, who made God?’ She was like, ‘What do you say to that?’

“I had a lot of people saying I was 3 years old going on 30, but I couldn’t read anything.’

Now, Schaefer is the University of North Alabama’s first student Fulbright Scholar award winner. The determination she showed in fighting through her dyslexia to be a high achieving student played a key role in her securing this national academic honor.

Schaefer will graduate from UNA in May with a degree in visual art and a minor in public communication. The Birmingham native will leave in August for the Czech Republic, where she, with the financial assistance of the Fulbright grant, will be an English teaching assistant.

Mollie volunteers with dyslexia service groups to help younger students who remind her of herself. She’s been paired with students who are grade-levels behind in reading because of her ability to relate to those students, and help them achieve.

“I was determined,” she said. “I wanted to go to college because I was really stubborn and decided (after being rejected by other schools) I was going to go to some other school and be awesome.”

She’s been that and more, her advisor, Matt Price, said. Price is director of premier national and international awards and learning support at UNA.

Mollie volunteers with dyslexia service groups to help younger students who remind her of herself. She’s been paired with students who are grade-levels behind in reading because of her ability to relate to those students, and help them achieve.

Mollie said she knew about the Fulbright program because a peer at another institution had received the award, but she did not necessarily see herself as a fit for the program.

Price thought otherwise, and planted the seed during Mollie’s junior year at UNA.

“She’s fearless,” Price said. “She does all this volunteering. She has this passion to help other dyslexic people succeed. She’s tireless and absolutely fearless.”

Mollie does not know yet where in the Czech Republic she will be assigned. She said she will spend the summer learning to speak and understand Czech, which she admits will be an intensive undertaking because of her dyslexia.

However, she said learning the language is important in her role as an ambassador for the United States and U.S. culture.

Fellow UNA senior Jasmine Fleming was a Fulbright semifinalist. UNA had eight students apply for the Fulbright award.

“We have great students who have learned from their faculty and gone through their programs, and are able to compete on the national stage and win,” Price said. “It is a huge testament to UNA’s ability to take in high achieving students or not and turn them into nationally competitive award-winning students.”
University of Alabama senior Anton McKee has been named the 2016-17 Southeastern Conference H. Boyd McWhorter Male Scholar-Athlete of the Year, SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey announced Thursday.

The two-time SEC 200 breaststroke champion and 11-time All-American has led Alabama in the pool and classroom over his four-year Crimson Tide career, becoming the first UA swimmer to earn the conference's highest academic accolade. Texas A&M swimmer Sarah Gibson earned the women's honor.

"Anton and Sarah are amazing young people who are an inspiration for their commitment to the complete student-athlete experience of success in competition and excellence in the classroom," Sankey said. "Each of them are All-Americans in the pool and 4.0 students in the classroom, making them the ideal recipients of the H. Boyd McWhorter Award, the highest individual honor a student-athlete can achieve in the Southeastern Conference."

McKee and Gibson will receive a $15,000 postgraduate scholarships and will be honored at the league's awards dinner during the SEC Spring Meetings in Sandestin, Fla., in early June.

"We are extremely proud to have one of our student-athletes earn this extraordinary honor for the fourth time in the past five years," UA Director of Athletics Greg Byrne said. "Anton's drive and determination to be the very best he can be has resulted in a tremendous career, both in the pool and the classroom, and he epitomizes the dedication to excellence this award represents."

Alabama team named National Club of the Year

By Becky Hopf
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

Shelby Akin entered the freshman class at the University of Alabama five years ago as a standout high school tennis player from Huntsville.

Her goal was to get a degree. She chose not to pursue playing on a collegiate varsity team, but she did want to still play the sport she loves. So, soon after she arrived that freshman year, she joined the university's USTA Tennis on Campus club team. No pressure, or so she thought, just a great way to work on her game and continue her play against respectable competition.

Five years later, she'll graduate on May 6 and leave Tuscaloosa with not only a journalism degree but as one of the most respected collegiate club tennis leaders in the nation. In mid-April, in conjunction with the USTA Tennis on Campus national championship tournament, Alabama was named the National Club of the Year. It is also this year's Southern section Club of the Year.

Though she shuns taking the credit for the coveted honor, Akin has been the club's president for the past three years and was named the Tennis on Campus Leader of the Year for the Southern section.

She said there were 10 to 15 players on the team her freshman year. This past fall, around 90 showed up for one of the first team practices.

The growth was no accident. Akin spearheaded membership drives around campus in a grassroots-style campaign.

“Our membership has grown vastly over the past couple of years,” Akin said. “We’ve done better at tournaments every single year. We won two tournaments this year for the first time ever when we won two in a row in the fall, one in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and one in Chattanooga, Tennessee. It was the first time, since I’d been here, that we’d even won a tournament, so it was exciting for me personally. I think we’re having a higher level of play each year. We did much better in pretty much every single tournament that we played in this year. We’re placing higher. We have more people coming out for practice consistently. We have 20-30 people coming out to every practice, which is nice, and we’ve got a lot of people on the team who have become really involved in the community.”

Among those are Evan Enquist, who coaches Alabama’s highly successful wheelchair tennis team, and Jared Halstrom, who started a clinic for kids at Oakdale Elementary School, which serves special needs students.

“One of the reasons we won club of the year has to do with our community outreach,” Akin said. “We put together a really solid plan a few years ago on what we wanted to do every year and how we wanted to grow the club. We wanted to increase membership. We wanted to increase club functions. I think it’s really paid off now. We definitely laid solid groundwork for the next years to come.”

One of the first hints of success to come and the club’s impact came in 2014–15 when Alabama’s club won the Tennis on Campus sportsmanship award at a national tournament.

“My freshman year, I joined the club just to play tennis,” Akin said. “I really quickly that I wanted to be a part of what the club was doing. I wanted a leadership role, but I never dreamed that I’d end up being president for three years.”

The team has advanced to nationals for three years in a row, finishing 35th of 64 teams in 2016-17. Qualifying for nationals, year in and out, has been a club goal achieved. Alabama hasn’t been able to host a tournament yet, a goal Akin had set and has tried to make happen, but she’s proud of the legacy she and her fellow club officers, past and present, and teammates will leave.

“I’d definitely say that being national club of the year is definitely one of my proudest achievements,” Akin said. “We all really worked hard for it. It was a pretty huge group effort. We won based on three or four years of very hard work and planning. It might be just for the 2016-17 year, but it wouldn’t have happened if we hadn’t been doing all the stuff in 2012, 2013 and on. I think going to nationals three years in a row is pretty remarkable. It’s pretty difficult to get to nationals, especially coming out of the southern sectional.

“Club tennis has been one of the most important things I’ve done since I’ve been at the University of Alabama. It’s provided me with some great friends. Most of my friends now are from club tennis. Most of my most fun trips have been from club tennis. I’m just proud of where the club is and how far it’s come. It’s been a special part of my life.”
Up-and-down season

Alabama is only program in the nation with top-six finishes in each of last 10 years

By Terrin Waack
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

Katie Bailey left a note in her locker after cleaning it out for one last time. In it, the University of Alabama senior gymnast reminds the next owner to embrace every moment of her career because the four years go by quicker than expected. Each individual season goes by even faster.

The Crimson Tide just wrapped up its 2017 journey, finishing sixth in the nation for the first time since 2009.

“I don’t believe in flukes,” Bailey said. “I believe whatever happened was supposed to happen, but this team is really talented and we worked our butts off all season.”

A streak was expanded, too. Alabama holds an NCAA-best 33 top-six finishes overall. It’s a reflection of the season. There were a lot of ups and downs. She constantly had to change team in each of the last 10 years. It holds an NCAA-best 33 top-six finishes overall.

UA coach Dana Duckworth believes sixth was a clear reflection of the season. There were a lot of ups and downs. She constantly had to change.

Alabama’s Katie Bailey closed out her career with an NCAA individual title on the uneven bars, her favorite event. She was the Crimson Tide’s only national champion this season. Alabama finished sixth in the national championships last week. [STAFF PHOTO/ERIN NELSON]

TIDE

Continued from C1

the lineup due to injuries, and it was never just one event that gave the team issues. It changed weekly and was challenging to manage.

“I also go back to the fact that isn’t it an honor to be a part of a program where coming in sixth in the country isn’t good enough?” Duckworth said. “I don’t look at that as a negative. I look at that as something that fires me up.”

At national championships, the Crimson Tide earned six All-America honors, splitting among junior Kiana Winston (three) and seniors Aja Sims, Keely McNeer and Bailey. Beforehand, junior Nickie Guerrero, Winston (four) and Sims had already received regular season All-America honors.

Bailey closed out her career with a second NCAA individual title, this time on the uneven bars, her favorite event. She was the Crimson Tide’s only national champion.

“I’m not really sure what my life is yet without gymnastics, so I think that’s going to be interesting to figure out,” Bailey said. “It’s definitely been bittersweet.”

In total, Alabama graduates six seniors - Amanda Jetter, Mary Lillian Sanders, Mackenzie Valentin, Bailey, Sims and McNeer. The biggest thing Duckworth believes UA loses with that class is its competitive experience. All have been a part of the lineup since their sophomore years. Most have been since freshman.

The Crimson Tide is gaining five new faces in Bailie Key, Kylie Dickson, Alonza Klopfer, Lexi Graber and Kait Scott. It’s also now allowed to utilize sophomore Peyton Ernst, who redshirted due to NCAA transfer rules after she left Florida.

Like every year, it’ll be a new team.

“The strongest point of this team was the heart that we had for each other,” Winston said. “I would have to say we genuinely care for one another, and we did our gymnastics for one another.”

That bond is something the Crimson Tide wants to continue to have and build. It’ll keep the motto “for her” - and never forget the “trust your training” mantra.

But for now it’s over. The gymnasts’ bodies need a break, and so does Duckworth’s brain. It was a rocky ride — with a season-high 197.825 and a season-low 195.325 — but the lessons learned from the losses were just as important as the ones from the wins.

“We worked hard and gave the best we had for the season,” freshman Maddie Desch said. “I just think it’s so cool that I get to do it again.”
‘Desert Fox’ not slowing down yet

IAN THOMPSON

Steve Hudson has been on quite a tear lately in senior amateur golf. Hudson, who played on the University of Alabama’s first SEC Championship-winning team in 1979, grew up in Jasper under the watchful eye of his father, Travis Hudson Sr., who was the longtime head professional at Musgrove Country Club. Steve’s older brother Tab also played for UA, while younger brother, Philip, played one year for Auburn before transferring to Alexander City Junior College.

All three brothers are in the Walker High School Hall of Fame for golf.

Steve Hudson, long a fine player in statewide amateur golf with multiple state titles to his name, has really kicked it up a notch since turning 55 four years ago. Fifty-five is the magic number to become eligible for national senior amateur golf events and he has taken full advantage.

An event that he seems to particularly enjoy is the Society of Seniors Senior Masters at Indian Wells CC in Palm Springs, Calif. He won it in 2014, was unable to play in 2015, but returned the last two years, winning both times.

“They have now nicknamed me the Alabama Desert Fox,” Hudson told me during a recent phone conversation.

This is deference to World Golf Hall of Famer Johnny Miller who dominated desert golf on the PGA Tour in the 1970’s, and was thus coined the ‘Desert Fox.’

At this year’s SOS Senior Masters, Steve fired rounds of 68-67 to take six-shot lead into the final round. A poor ninth hole led to a double-bogey and he found himself only two clear with five holes to play, but five straight pars was enough for a two-shot win.

“I’m still trying to implement what my Dad taught me as a young man under his tutelage and I feel a lot of his wisdom makes more and more sense every year. That’s been a big thing for me as he was such a good teacher,” Hudson said.

He is now the second ranked senior amateur in the country in the Golfweek rankings.

Prior to his win in the SOS Senior Masters, he has had, since the turn of the year, a second in the Gasparilla Invitational in Tampa, Fla.; finished ninth in the Bob Jones Senior Cup in Sea Island, Ga.; won the SOS Four Ball with partner Lawrence Field at Grayhawk in Arizona; and was fourth in the Golfweek National Senior at PGA West in California.

He has no plans of slowing down as The Coleman at famed Seminole in South Florida is next; he and partner Robert Nelson will defend their State Four Ball title (“against the young guys”) at Saugahatchee CC in Opelika; followed by the State Senior Amateur at Hoover CC; U.S. Senior Open qualifying at Wynlakes in Montgomery; CC
Birmingham National Invitational; and then the U.S. Senior Challenge at Pine Tree CC. This just takes him to early June!

Hudson is in the financial planning and wealth business and was recently recognized by Barrons financial magazine.

"I'm fortunate in that I have a great team around me and I can do a lot of my work on the road. Technology is a huge help to me. My wife and high school honey, Karen, travels to some of the tournaments with me too and has always been my biggest supporter."

Hudson talked of his love to compete.

"Playing this national schedule has motivated me to stay healthy and on top of my game. I play far more golf and events on the road, than I do at Old Overton (his home club).

"I do really enjoy the competition and meeting people. It was the legendary Babe Zaharias who said 'The greatest thing about the game is the people you meet along the way.' I totally agree."

PGA Tour's Zurich Classic is now a team event

On Thursday the PGA Tour's Zurich Classic, played in New Orleans, will debut a new team format. There are a number of teams with strong local ties including: UA pairs of Justin Thomas and Bud Cauley, and Trey Mullinax and Bobby Wyatt; Michael Thompson of UA and Tim Wilkinson; UA's Jason Bohn and Carl Pettersson; Jason Dufner and Patton Kizzire; Russell Knox and Kevin Streelman; Smylie Kaufman and Harold Varner III; Bubba Watson and J.B. Holmes; Freddie Jacobson and Willy Wilcox; Steven Bowditch and Boo Weekley; Ben Martin and Ben Crane; and Russell Henley and Blayne Barber.

UA 2018 commit Frankie Capan III wins again

Frankie Capan III, who is a 2018 verbal commit to Alabama, can add another AJGA win to his resume, as he earned a two-shot victory Sunday at the Ping Heather Farr Classic.

A closing 1-under 70 was enough for Capan to win by two shots. For 54 holes, he finished five-under at Longbow Golf Club in Mesa, Ariz.

He has two previous AJGA wins and was named a Rolex Junior All-America last year. His 2016 win at the Puerto Rico Junior Open earned him his PGA Tour debut that spring at the Puerto Rico Open, where he missed the cut by a single shot.

The Tuscaloosa News
Monday, April 24, 2017

Ian Thompson has been writing about golf in Alabama for over 23 years. His weekly "Mr. Golf" column concentrates on golfers, golf events and people associated with the sport of interest to the Tuscaloosa and Birmingham areas. Reach him with story ideas at thompson-teesoff@gmail.com
Three in the first

Alabama's Humphrey, Allen, Howard taken in first round of NFL Draft

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

Editor's Note: The first round of the NFL Draft was still in progress at press time.

It took longer than expected, but eventually the Tide couldn't be kept at bay any longer.

More than two hours into the draft, a University of Alabama player was drafted in the first round of the 2017 NFL Draft. Cornerback Marlon Humphrey got the ball rolling when the Baltimore Ravens called his name with the No. 16 overall pick.

He was quickly followed by defensive lineman Jonathan Allen, who was selected at 17 by the Washington Redskins. Allen grew up in Ashburn, Va., less than an hour from Washington D.C. He was a Redskins fan as a boy.

"This has been a long time coming," Allen said. "I just want to prove the Redskins right for picking me."

Allen was projected as one of the top two or three players heading into the draft but shoulder issues revealed during his Scouting Combine physical scared some teams away. He said every team he met with before the draft cleared him medically.

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adding that his shoulders didn’t bother him his senior season.
Two picks after Allen, dynamic tight end O.J. Howard was chosen by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers with the No. 19 pick. Howard will team with Jameis Winston, a Heisman Trophy winning quarterback from Florida State who played in high school at Hueytown.

With a first-round pick Thursday night, Alabama added to its consecutive years with a player chosen in the first round. The Crimson Tide has now had a player selected in the first round in every year since 2009. Over that time, UA produced 20 first-round players, more than any other program in the nation.

UA head coach Nick Saban hit the red carpet before the draft. He was in Philadelphia to support his players.

“We’re losing five guys that may go in the first round tonight and probably four or five other guys that will get drafted, so we’ve got a lot of players that are getting their dreams realized tonight, which I’m happy for them, but that creates a lot of opportunity for other guys in our program, so we’re looking forward to getting them developed,” Saban said.

— Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
With the No. 1 pick, I would’ve taken Allen

Kevin Scarbinsky kscarbinsky@al.com

With the first pick in the 2017 NFL Draft, you can have Texas A&M defensive end Myles Garrett. Go ahead. Be my guest.

Good luck in Cleveland, Mr. Garrett. The Browns can have his freakish athleticism, his 4.64-second 40-yard dash, his 33 reps in the bench press, his 41-inch vertical jump and his 128-inch broad jump, all at 6-foot-4 and 272 pounds. They can have his terrific reported score of 31 on the Wonderlic test.

If I were part of the brain trust of an NFL team, I would be thrilled to add Garrett to my roster. If Von Miller and Jadeveon Clowney had a son, he might be Myles Garrett.

But if I had made the first pick in Thursday’s NFL Draft, I wouldn’t have taken Garrett for a number of reasons, none more simple and straightforward than this one. As good as he was during his college career, as good as he may become at the next level, Garrett wasn’t the best player at his position in his own division.

Alabama’s Jonathan Allen was.

Allen was more than the best defensive end in the SEC West. He was the best defensive player on the best defensive team in college football. He was the best defensive player in the country. Period.

It’s true that Allen didn’t have the same freakish numbers as Garrett at the NFL Combine. Allen, at 6-foot-3 and 286 pounds, was solid with a 5-flat 40, 21 reps in the bench press, a 30-inch vertical and a 108-inch broad jump.

SEE SCARBINSKY, B3
SCARBINSKY
FROM BI

It’s also true that no one has ever played an NFL game in Under Armour underwear alone. On the football field, in full pads, where it counts, Allen was a better player than Garrett last season against comparable competition.

You can give Garrett’s numbers an asterisk because of a nagging sprained ankle, but for the season, Allen had more tackles (69-33), tackles for loss (16-15) and sacks (10.5-8.5). Of Garrett’s sacks, 4½ came against UTSA. Garrett had more forced fumbles (2-0), but Allen had more fumble recoveries (3-1).

In Alabama’s 33-14 win over Texas A&M, Allen made the play of the game when he scooped and scored from 30 yards out on one of those fumble recoveries to give the Crimson Tide some separation in the final seconds of the third quarter.

That day, Garrett was good. Allen was better. Oh, and his reported 27 on the Wonderlic isn’t too shabby, either.

In their last head-to-head meeting, Garrett had seven tackles, 3½ of them for a loss, and no sacks. Allen had six tackles, one for a loss, one sack and that fumble return for that turning-point touchdown. He also made a play so athletic and unique, it earned a nickname and a painting.

They call it the Superman sack.

If you’re an NFL executive, coach or scout, it’s worth noting that Allen, playing inside and outside, has made plays for four years while surrounded by more future NFL players than Garrett. It’s not easy to beat Tim Williams and Ryan Anderson to the quarterback or Reuben Foster and Dalvin Tomlinson to the ball, yet Allen did it on a consistent basis.

Of all the Alabama players projected to be drafted this weekend, it’s easy to see a number of them having long and productive NFL careers. Tight end O.J. Howard stands out as the right man at the right position to survive and succeed for a decade or more.

Alabama defensive lineman Jonathan Allen finished last season with 69 tackles, 16 for a loss, and 10.5 sacks. He also recovered three fumbles, including one he returned for a touchdown against Texas A&M. Vasha Hunt / staff file

These things are never easy to predict, and I’m not Mel Kiper Jr. or Todd McShay, but if you ask me which of those Alabama players will last the longest and produce the most at the next level, I’d say the same thing I would if I had the first pick in the 2017 NFL Draft.

Give me Jonathan Allen, and watch him go to work.
ALABAMA FOOTBALL

Unheralded LB earns praise

With 10 tackles in A-Day game, Holcombe solidifies his role

Matt Zenitz mzenitz@al.com

Only one player had more than seven tackles during Alabama’s A-Day game on Saturday.
Keith Holcombe.
With Shaun Dion Hamilton continuing to work back from the torn ACL he suffered in December, Holcombe was the first-team inside linebacker next to Rashaan Evans throughout the spring.

And while former top recruits such as Mack Wilson and Dylan Moses are more known outside the Crimson Tide program, Holcombe showed Saturday why he’s so highly thought of internally at Alabama.
The 6-foot-4, 230-pound redshirt junior posted 10 tackles and two sacks, helping the Tide’s first-team defense hold the first-team offense’s running backs to an average of just 3.5 yards per carry.

“I’m very excited to have this opportunity here,” Holcombe said recently. “I feel more comfortable in playing my role, making the calls, having guys ask me questions. It’s kind of crazy, like the new guys coming in asking me questions, because I remember when I was doing the same thing a couple years ago when I was in their role. But I think I’m stepping up to the plate the right way for my new role, and I’m really enjoying this opportunity here.”

Last year, Alabama All-American inside linebacker Reuben Foster described Holcombe as a “whole ‘nother animal” while All-American defensive lineman Jonathan Allen said Holcombe is “just like Reuben in a lot of ways.”

“When his time comes, he’s definitely going to be that,” Allen said at the time. “I feel like he can be a really good linebacker.”
The Tuscaloosa native falls into the category of unheralded but valuable, likely to again be a top backup after posting 24 tackles last year,

2017 Season Opener
What: Alabama Crimson Tide vs. Florida State Seminoles
When: Saturday, Sept. 2
Where: Mercedes-Benz Stadium; Atlanta

including a team-high 12 on special teams.
Holcombe played through a labrum injury this spring, an injury he’s expected to undergo surgery to repair. Still, Holcombe had a productive spring that ended with him producing at a high level during the spring game.

“Whatever they ask me to do,” Holcombe said, “I’m gonna do it to my fullest ability.”
BAMA BUSTS?

There is a perception that Alabama players taken in the first round of the NFL Draft don’t pan out. The Tuscaloosa News takes an in depth look to see if that myth is true or not

By Aaron Suttles
Sports Writer

On the game’s biggest stage, during the final 60 minutes of the NFL’s season on Super Bowl LI, three former University of Alabama players performed starring roles in front of the football-watching world. Courtney Upshaw sacked Tom Brady. Julio Jones made two acrobatic catches among his four receptions for 87 yards. Dont’a Hightower made the game-changing play when he strip-sacked Matt Ryan to jump start the Patriots’ comeback.

Last season also saw six former Crimson Tide players make the Pro Bowl, the most of any program in the country. Jones, Amari Cooper, Hightower, C.J. Mosley, Ha Ha Clinton-Dix and Landon Collins represented UA. The next-closest program, Florida, had three Pro Bowlers.

Former UA Heisman Trophy winner Mark Ingram rushed for more than 1,000 yards in 2016 and averaged among the league leaders in yards per carry.

Yet as the 2017 NFL Draft approaches, there remains a nagging doubt about Alabama players and a perception that they turn out to be busts in the pro league. The Tuscaloosa News decided to look into the metrics to examine if that perception is valid or an overblown fallacy.

Why does the perception exist? This is difficult to trace back to its roots. It likely began when former UA Butkus Award-winning middle linebacker Rolando McClain flamed out in Oakland. The truth is it likely could have had its genesis in former Outland Trophy-winning left tackle Andre Smith starting just five games in his first two seasons with the Cincinnati Bengals.

Both were top-10 selections in their respective draft classes: Smith at No. 6 overall in 2009 and McClain at No. 8 in 2010.

A year later, Ingram played in just 10 games for New Orleans and started only four after being selected in the later stages of the 2011 first round. Fair or not, there exists an expectation for Heisman Trophy winners. Through no fault of his own – he really wasn’t given a chance as the Saints’ full-time running back until 2014 – Ingram added to the perception of Alabama players not panning out at the next level.

Three players drafted in the first round in the Nick Saban era are out of the league: McClain, Trent Richardson and Dee Milliner.

McClain was cut by the Raiders, then retired, then un-retired, was picked up by Dallas and then was suspended for violating the league’s substance abuse policy. It’s possible McClain will get another attempt at a career comeback, but it remains a longshot.

Richardson was drafted No. 3 overall in 2012 by the Cleveland...
Continued from C1

Browns, an unusually high spot for a running back since the game began to devalue the position. He was traded in the middle of his second season to the Indianapolis Colts before eventually being released a year later. Richardson signed with a couple of different teams since but has never made a roster. He’s struggled with his conditioning, according to multiple NFL scouts, and a recent charge of domestic violence has kept his name in the media for all the wrong reasons.

Milliner is out of the league strictly because his body broke down. He was drafted with the ninth pick by the New York Jets and started 14 games in three-year NFL career. After various injuries, Milliner, just 25 years old, is retired from pro football.

The injury conundrum of Alabama players – or perhaps more aptly stated as the injury perception – remains high on NFL scouts’ worries about drafting Crimson Tide players.

Take this year’s draft class for instance. One of the game’s most decorated defensive players in program history, Jonathan Allen, should be a lock to be selected as a top-10 pick judging by scouts’ evaluations of him. However, reports of multiple surgeries during his time at Alabama and mild arthritis in his shoulders have some scouts worried.

Reuben Foster had offseason surgery to repair a rotator cuff. Scouts have expressed concern about his long-term viability as well.

In previous draft classes, Cyrus Kouandjio’s physical revealed him to have arthritis and chronic swelling and pain in his knee. Those results caused him to drop in the draft.

The Tuscaloosa News talked to three NFL scouts who all confirmed injury history is a topic that comes up when scouting UA players. One particular scout said his NFL team hasn’t drafted an Alabama player because of those concerns.

For all of those reasons and likely more, there is a stigma attached to Alabama players at this time of year. Will they under perform? Are they used up before they get to the NFL?

The numbers say those perceptions aren’t true.

An examination of every NFL first-round draft pick since 2009 (the first year a Saban-era Alabama player was drafted) reveals UA players perform at a higher level in multiple categories than the average first-round NFL draft pick.

Since 2009, UA had 18 players drafted in the first round. Seven of those selections have been to a Pro Bowl (this does not include a player being a replacement selection) for a 38.9 percent success rate in that metric.

Fifteen of the 18 have become full-time starters for a success rate of 83.3 percent (this total does not include the players who are out of the league but were
at one point full-time starters during their careers).

Three of those 18 (16.7 percent) are out of the league.

By contrast, the rest of the first-rounders since 2009 produced the following:

- 64 of 237 (27 percent) were voted to the Pro Bowl.
- 158 of 237 (66.7) have become full-time starters for their teams.
- 24 of 237 (10.1) percent are out of the league.

The numbers simply don’t back up the perception that Alabama players don’t flourish in the NFL at the same rate as others drafted in the first round.

So The Tuscaloosa News asked NFL personnel and draft experts their opinions on the subject. The consensus was that two things continue to feed this perception even when reality doesn’t.

First, Alabama players are closer to their ceilings than some other players because of how they were coached and developed.

“My advice to scouts when they come into Alabama is you better make sure that your coaches and your development program is as good or better than what the guys are going through in Tuscaloosa,” Phil Savage said.

Savage has worked essentially his entire adult life in scouting and personnel, including a four-year stint as general manager with the Cleveland Browns. He currently serves as the executive director of the Senior Bowl and as Alabama’s color commentator for radio broadcasts.

“In other words, is a defensive back ever going to be coached better than he is at Alabama under Nick Saban? I say maybe not,” Savage said. “So if that’s the case, if this is the zenith of this player’s potential, then you have to forecast that to the next level.

“What I’m saying is that NFL scouts absolutely have to take into consideration over a three- or four- or five-year period, ‘Hey, is the Alabama player closer to his potential or his ceiling than say a guy from a smaller school who may have a lot of ability but hasn’t been developed yet? He hasn’t had the training, the nutrition, the ability to go the weight room in first-class facilities.’ That’s always the rub in scouting. How much room is there for him to grow?

“I think Alabama prepares their players as well as if not better than anybody in the country. Because the guys that make it, and hey everybody has

See next page
guys that don't make it, but the ones that do make it seem to be the real leaders and the stars of their team when you look at Julio Jones and Dont'a Hightower and players of that caliber."

The second reason this perception exists is directly related to how long Alabama's season typically goes. UA has been in the College Football Playoff field all three years since the current format has been adapted, and has been in the national title conversation at the end of the season in all but two of Saban's 10 seasons in Tuscaloosa.

Dan Shonka, general manager and national scout for the Ourlads' NFL Scouting Service, said Alabama players' injuries that are revealed during draft time are directly related to the length of the Crimson Tide's season.

"Jonathan Allen said that the (Alabama) practices are tougher than the games," Shonka said. "So the guys have been through the mill, and they're very good football players, but some of the guys are beat up pretty good.

"They've got to have time to heal, and because Alabama is usually in a national championship game those guys don't have as much time to recover as other guys who aren't in that."

Shonka defined a bust from an NFL personnel perspective as a player who has been drafted in the first round who has not been able to start during the first three years of his career.

"If you're not a starter or you only play six games a year in the first part of your contract, I'd say you're a bust," he said.

Given that Alabama had a higher rate of its players earn full-time starter status than the rest of the first-round selections since 2009, Alabama produces "busts" at a lower rate.

The first round of the 2017 NFL Draft is Thursday night. ESPN draft analyst Mel Kiper predicts five Alabama players will be chosen in the first round, more than any other program in the country.

Will those five players be busts or productive players? Perception has it that they'll not live up to expectations. The metrics say otherwise.

Reach Aaron Suttles at aaron@tidesports.com or at 205-722-0229.
FOOTBALL
Former grad assistant lands job

The Nick Saban coaching tree added another branch on Monday.

Gabe Giardina, a former University of Alabama place kicker who served as a graduate assistant on Saban's first UA staff in 2007, was named the new head football coach at Albany (Ga.) State on Monday.

Giardina had served as the offensive coordinator and offensive line coach at Charleston Southern for the past two seasons, and was part of the Buccaneer staff when CSU played Alabama in November, 2015.

The previous Albany State head coach, Dan Land, resigned in March. Land had compiled an 11-8 record in two seasons at Albany State. The Golden Rams compete in NCAA Division II and are members of the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference.

"We are going to be a bright light in this community that alums and community members will be proud of by the way our young men compete on the field and by the way they conduct themselves off the field," Giardina said at his introductory press conference in Albany on Monday. "It is our goal that all our players have the type of experience that truly transforms their lives and puts them on a path to do the same for others, all while bringing home championships to southwest Georgia."

Giardina, whose father was a 17-year athletic department employee at Penn State, was originally recruited to Alabama by former coach Dennis Franchione and played for former coach Mike Shula. Following his senior season, Giardina became a graduate assistant for Shula and was retained by Saban in his initial Alabama season.

— Cecil Hurt
SEC beverage options still limited

Commissioner firm on no alcohol sales in football stadiums

By Terrin Waack
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

BIRMINGHAM — Let's crack a cold one here.

It is no secret that the Southeastern Conference does not permit alcohol sales in its football stadiums, or at least not in general seating. The SEC has held on tightly to that rule, even as other Power Five schools start to loosen their reins.

Ohio State, home to one of the four 2016 College Football Playoff semifinal teams, started selling beer stadium-wide this past year, and according to The Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch, its alcohol sales topped $1.1 million in the debut season. The university released the number back in December, along with the noteworthy fact that there were fewer problems with fans than in prior years.

Ohio State and Minnesota are among the Big Ten schools that allow alcohol sales. The Big 12 has Texas and West Virginia and the ACC has Syracuse and Miami.

See SEC, C3
Most of the other conferences are present on the booze cruise.

Still, SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey wasn't budging Monday at the Associated Press Sports Editors Southeast Region meeting at UAB.

"The conference has a policy that says that we're not selling alcohol in the general seating area," Sankey said. "Now, you can agree or disagree with that policy, but that's the policy. The basis for changing that or maintaining it is one that's developed in the conversation."

With public safety as a main concern, the argument that alcohol sales would increase attendance rates wasn't enough either. Sankey didn't even hesitate to refute it.

"I think we were at like 98 percent ticket sales in football," he said. "So is that one-percent margin a trade that we're going to make?"

There's talk, but no action — yet.

To be clear, SEC's policy states:

"No alcoholic beverages shall be sold or dispensed for public consumption anywhere in the facility and the possession and/or consumption of alcoholic beverages in the public areas of the facility shall be prohibited. These prohibitions shall not apply to private, leased areas in the facility or other areas designated by the SEC."

At least that stands true in football stadiums.

Select schools within the SEC allow alcohol at baseball games. At Alabama, students can bring beer and drink in their designated right-field seating. They're allowed to bring six beers per person, which have to be in a non-clear cup, but alcohol isn't sold.

"We, as I understand it, have some alcohol present," Sankey said. "That provokes the conversation."

There are also college basketball arenas across the nation that serve alcohol.

So, other venues have it and it's not like football and beer don't naturally go together. One of the NFL's league-wide sponsors is Anheuser-Busch, a beer company. Not a Super Bowl goes by without commercials for alcoholic beverages.

The peer pressure may be getting to the SEC, but it still might not be enough.

"At some point, I'm relatively certain, there will be further review of the prohibition," Sankey said. "That doesn't predict any outcome."
Alabama loaded with talent, but not elite yet

By: Cecil Hurt

The University of Alabama football program has accomplished so much in a decade under Nick Saban that the Crimson Tide head coach sometimes encounters a frustrating problem.

Saban has to convince the world that a team that’s just wrapped up spring practice isn’t great by default. He has to convince players of the same thing — an easier task, admittedly, when the preceding season didn’t end in a national championship, but a necessity. Complacency is the enemy in Saban’s world. That’s what he tried to explain after “I don’t think we’re an elite team right now,” Saban said. “We’re kind of an adequate team.”

Does anyone believe him when he says such things, even when they are true? Outside the media room after the Crimson team took a 27-24 win in the A-Day game, Saban was cautious. Yet even as Saban spoke, ESPN’s Kirk Herbstreit was on Twitter proclaiming that Alabama was “still the team to beat” and lauding Alabama’s newly-arrived talent, flashy offensive players like Tua Tagovailoa, Jerry Jeudy and Najee Harris. So how many people took Saban’s proclamation of “adequacy” to heart?

One lesson that was learned, or at least reinforced: A-Day, for the fans, is all about novelty. The biggest crowd and the most enthusiasm of the Saban A-Days came in 2007, when he was new to Tuscaloosa. This year is being praised as a “great” A-Day, which it probably was compared to some of the 6-3 snoopers of the distant past. People like offense and they especially like offense from new faces. The exponential growth in the number of “early entry” signees has turned A-Day games into “sneak previews.” Without comparison of performances, it’s fair to say that Tagovailoa, Jeudy and Harris generated more buzz than Jalen Hurts, Bo Scarbrough (had he played) and Calvin Ridley. Those veterans are proven stars, rightly ranked among the best players in America. What’s more, Hurts absolutely appeared to be an improved passer, as Saban had promised. Regardless of whether there were secondary busts or not (there were), Hurts’ deep passes were precise. What’s new, though, is what is more interesting.

That perception will change somewhat in the regular season. When the business boils down to beating Florida State, most people are going to want Scarbrough, Ridley and, yes, Hurts on the field.

Until then, there’s going to be lively debate though. Possibly, Nick Saban won’t mind that a bit.

In the post-game Q-and-A with Saban, I attempted an end run around the quarterback race by asking about what had been settled on the offensive line. Saban saw through that tactic and I got lectured anyway.

“We’re going to have competition,” he said. “Competition is healthy. It’s not significant to me if we have five starters right now. What’s significant to me is that we have guys competing. I know (the media) wants to know right now. You’re only interested in results. There’s no process.
There’s no development, even though football is a developmental sport. You just want results, so you can set a guy up and then tear him down.

“But we’re going to have competition here, because we’ve always done that.”

That’s a lot to unpack, but the immediate takeaway is this. The only real answer that comes from A-Day, despite statistics – Saban dismissed those as “misleading” anyway – is whether there is enough talent to get from “adequate” to “elite.”

That seemed to be the case. There will be competition – and lots of it.
Feeling right at home

Freshman receiver Jeudy has strong effort with 134 yards, 2 TDs

By Drew Hill
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

What is new for Alabama wideout Jerry Jeudy?

Everything, actually.
The former five-star recruit is 753 miles from hometown in Florida, with a brand new coaching staff, a new playbook, and a completely different surrounding cast.

None of that mattered in Saturday's A-Day game in Bryant-Denny Stadium, because he looked right at home from kickoff.

The true freshman caught five passes on eight targets for 134 yards and two touchdowns to lead all receivers in yardage and scores. His strong performance was enough to earn him the Dixie Howell Memorial Award for the most valuable player in this year's A-Day game.

When he arrived in Tuscaloosa, Jeudy's high school statistics were impressive, especially to a team who lost three of its top four wide receivers in the offseason, but the young talent confirmed his stand out numbers with his unmatched performance against the Crimson team defense on Saturday.

“(Jeudy) has improved well,” coach Nick Saban said. “He had a good day today. We obviously need some young guys to come through for us because receiver is not a position where we have a lot of depth.”

There were early signs that it was just Jeudy's day. On his first touchdown reception of the game, Jeudy had a tipped ball fall right into his lap after fellow receiver Xavian Marks let a pass from Tua Tagovailoa bounce off his hands. With nobody in front of him, he scampered in for the 25-yard score.

But the easy first touchdown can't describe the type of game that Jeudy put together. The freshman caught four passes along the sideline during the game, including two that required tricky footwork along the sideline. For a freshman with his unmatched performance against the defense, it was having fun.

The freshman caught a second touchdown pass in the second quarter on 29-yard strike across the middle from Tagovailoa. The Crimson secondary was looking shaky up to that point, and Jeudy was a large reason why.

“He definitely proved himself out there,” Fitzpatrick said. “He's a great player to play against.”

Jeudy's most athletic catch of the day did not come on one of his first half touchdowns, it came on a drive midway through the third quarter. Freshman quarterback Mac Jones threw a deep pass that was intended to be a back-shoulder fade, but instead it went high, where Jeudy made a leaping catch, twisting his body, while also tapping both feet inbounds.
A-DAY: What can Alabama fans expect from new offensive coordinator?

By: Aaron Suttles

It’s been the subject of one of the most posed questions of the spring, and a mention of it even led to one of Nick Saban’s most animated outbursts.

What kind of offense will first-year offensive coordinator Brian Daboll employ this season for the University of Alabama?

The simple answer is there isn’t one in particular. That’s because Daboll doesn’t have a “style,” at least that’s how he was described by one of his early influences and coaching mentors, Eric Mangini.

“I will say that in New England everything was based off of what works that week,” Mangini said. “There’s going to be that flexibility to if you’ve got to run the ball 50 times because that’s what’s best, then that’s what he’s going to do. And if the next game you have to be in empty formation and throw it 50 times then that’s what he’s going to do.

“Some guys get caught up with the dogma with the...it’s almost like religion to them that they have to do certain things because that’s who they are. And there’s value to that. I’m not knocking it. But my feeling and my experience has been to build a team and build a group of players that can do what’s best for that opponent. You’ll always have a second pitch. (Daboll has) a core group of things that he’ll do weekly and then there will be another group of plays or philosophy that’s based off that opponent.”

In short, Alabama’s offense will have a philosophy of part pro-style and part spread, but what it does week to week depends largely on the opponent.

That aligns with what the Crimson Tide’s offense was in 2016 to an extent, but Saban admitted Thursday morning during a radio interview that true freshman quarterback Jalen Hurts wasn’t developed as well as he could have been last season. That fact, also to an extent, shaped what the offense ultimately became.

“Sometimes later in the year when people played us in a way that we needed to be able to throw the ball, we may not have been as efficient as we would have liked to have been,” Saban said during an interview with WJOX. “That was probably our fault as coaches. Because we protected (Hurts), instead of developed him as a young player.

“The goal this spring and before next season is that we can create more balance by being a better passing team to go along with what we’re able to do with our feet as a quarterback — as well as how that creates balance for our overall offense and utilizes some of the other skill players that we have.”
"We want to be more pro-style as we were, with a mix of the spread. We want a dual-threat quarterback who can make plays with his feet, but maybe not necessarily have a bunch of quarterback runs to enhance the offense. So, I think that’s the goal for what we want to do. I think Brian brings a special skill set of being in the NFL, with a very successful program and offensive team."

Sneakily, Daboll might be the perfect candidate to tutor Hurts. On the professional level he worked with Chad Pennington, Jake Delhomme and Brett Favre. Delhomme and Favre were at the back ends of their respective careers. Both also learned new things from Daboll, Mangini said.

“That to me is pretty unique,” Mangini said.

Daboll was hired by Saban in 1998 to be his grad assistant, coming from William & Mary where he was a restricted-earnings coach. He made such an impression in East Lansing, Mich., that Saban recommended him to his friend Bill Belichick at the New England Patriots.

Starting as a defensive assistant, Daboll quickly earned a reputation as an up-and-comer there, too.

“He was impressive,” Mangini said. “He was impressive in terms of his level of preparation. The things that he knew about us. The things that he knew about the team. And then we gave him different assignments. He came in early in the morning. We gave him work to do, breakdowns to do and the work was really well done and detailed, and a lot of it. So we hired him in New England and he worked as a defensive assistant so I spent a bunch of time with him.

“For a young guy, just impressive. His maturity, his work ethic, his natural intelligence, recall. All of those things stood out. Over the years, we were in New England together for six years, and then I hired him in New York when I was with the Jets as the quarterbacks coach and then I hired him again in Cleveland as the offensive coordinator. So I really, obviously, feel strongly about him, and I think he’ll do a great job in that role (at Alabama). I think it’s a great fit.”

The sport of football is largely the same between the NFL and college, but in many ways it’s a different game. The players are professional as opposed to amateurs splitting their time between getting an education and playing the game. There aren’t as many ardent restrictions on time spent with players in the NFL as there is in college.

But Daboll has the experience of working with different personalities. During brief media viewing periods during spring practices, Daboll has been spotted giving lots of feedback, a most of it positive, to his quarterbacks (Hurts, Tua Tagovailoa and Mac Jones).

“He has a really good ability to work with all different types of guys,” Mangini said. “He’s worked with some challenging guys. You’re going to find a lot of that in the NFL, and I thought he tried really hard and was successful at connecting in whatever way motivated that person.
“Some guys are sensitive to criticism so you have to present it in a different way. Some guys only respond to hard coaching, and he has the ability to do that. I like that part of his personality a lot. His willingness to adjust his style to give the players the best chance to succeed.”

As for adjusting to the college game (he’s been coaching in the NFL since 2000), Mangini said Daboll is uniquely qualified.

“Brian also has a pretty big advantage. His two first experiences were with Nick Saban and Bill Belichick,” Mangini said. “He went and got his Ph.D. in coaching at the best coaching university you can go to. From an Xs and Os standpoint he’s got that.

“Will there be differences? I’m sure there’s going to be differences. But if you’re going to Alabama, you have aspirations to play pro football, and Brian’s going to put you in position to be successful not just at Alabama but later on. He’s going to be demanding from a standpoint of what’s expected of the player, retention and it’s going to be smart football.

“Will it have to be delivered in a different way or in different segments? I’m sure it will just because we have so much more time in pro football. But he’ll find ways to maximize that time.”

Daboll moved from one dynasty (the Patriots) to another (Alabama). He moved from working from one guaranteed Hall of Famer (Belichick) to another (Saban), moving from one branch of the coaching tree to another.

His absence of a signature style might be a good thing. Under Belichick, he learned the New England system. Later on, he worked with the “Digits” system, learning it from Brian Schottenheimer. Then he got a taste of the West Coast system with Bill Callahan.

“He’s been around all the major influences in the NFL, and he has the ability to pull out the best concepts from each one of those things,” Mangini said. “Experience is a huge plus as well. And he’s coached on defense.

“He started on defense and then he’s worked on offense. He’ll be able to give the offensive players a perspective that’s a lot deeper than most offensive coaches give because he’s done it, he’s coached it. So if the quarterback is watching tape, not that offensive coaches don’t understand what’s going on defensively, but there’s a difference between understanding it and being able to coach it. Brian has coached it. And if you look at quarterbacks that he’s worked with and hear some of the things that those guys have said whether it’s Jake Delhomme or Brett Favre or Chad Pennington, all smart guys, all really successful guys, and some of the guys were at the tail end of their career, they’ll talk about things that they learned under Brian.”

All eyes will be on the offense Saturday, but don’t expect to discern too much. Spring games are by their very nature vanilla. There is no sense in giving Florida State a four-month head start on scouting. But people will watch the offense anyway, trying to see what the offense might look like later this year.
Regardless of how it goes, though, one thing is for certain, Mangini said. Daboll won’t be outworked.

“Here’s what I’m going to tell you about Brian. It didn’t matter whether it was his first job with us in New England or whether he was the offensive coordinator, he worked the same way,” he said. “That to me is one of the things that distinguishes him from other people. He’s had success. He’s won Super Bowls. He’s made money. And his work ethic hasn’t changed. It’s a great trait.”
College campuses confront a new era of protests

By Lisa Rathke
The Associated Press

MONTPELIER, Vt. — Fearing a return to violent protests that roiled campuses in the 1970s, colleges and universities are re-examining how to protect free speech while keeping students and employees safe in a time of political polarization.

Campus police are trying new tactics to try to keep events peaceful, while other schools have abruptly canceled controversial speakers over safety concerns, as the University of California, Berkeley, did with conservative writer Ann Coulter’s appearance, originally scheduled for Thursday.

In response to earlier rioting at Berkeley, the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators last month put on daylong protest preparation and response training sessions at Chapman University in Orange, California, the University of Notre Dame in Indiana and the University of Maryland, attended by law enforcement from about 40 colleges and universities.

Another training session will take place Thursday at the University of Hartford in Connecticut.

“Our mission is basically to protect the university’s

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mission, which is to have civil debate and present both sides of an issue and have things be done in a way that's civil," said the association's president, Randy Burba, police chief at Chapman. "It's a challenge to make that happen when there's really opposing sides and views, but that's really what we're supposed to do."

Burba declined to offer specifics about the training, to avoid disclosing proprietary police tactics.

But, he said, the sessions were a chance to remind campus police of best practices: to know and be engaged with the college community, do research on speakers, look at what's happened at other campuses, and meet with the leaders of protest groups ahead of time to talk about their plans and the college rules.

At Vermont's Middlebury College last month, protesters shouted down guest speaker Charles Murray, a social scientist who critics say used pseudoscience to link intelligence to race in the 1994 book "The Bell Curve." Afterward, protesters surrounded Murray and professor Allison Stanger, with a protester pulling Stanger's hair, police said.

The protesters also climbed onto the car carrying Stanger and Murray and rocked it. Stanger, who was treated for a neck injury and a concussion, said she feared for her life.

Middlebury said last week that 70 people may be subject to discipline, and that more than 30 students so far had been punished, but officials did not elaborate.

Stanger wrote an editorial about her experience, saying the country's "constitutional democracy will depend on whether Americans can relearn how to engage civilly with one another, something that is admittedly hard to do with a bullying president as a role model. But any other way forward would be antithetical to the very ideals of the university and of liberal democracy."

Bertram Johnson, chairman of the political science department that co-sponsored the event, last week wrote in the college newspaper that it was a mistake for him to offer a co-sponsorship without wider consultation.

Complicating efforts to keep the peace is that protesters and event sponsors sometimes aren't connected to the schools hosting them.

Auburn University last week cited safety concerns in canceling an appearance by white nationalist Richard Spencer, arranged by an outside organization, but a federal judge prevented the school from doing so. Three people were arrested for disorderly conduct.

Texas A&M University has begun requiring that speakers be sponsored by a student, faculty or staff organization after a former student arranged a speech by Spencer in December.

The school held a simultaneous counter-event in the stadium called Aggies United, with speakers and musical acts, instead of a potential confrontation at the building where the speech was held, spokeswoman Amy Smith said.

Berkeley's cancellation of Coulter's appearance came days after violent clashes at a rally in support of President Donald Trump off campus, in downtown Berkeley. Students who invited her have sued the university, saying it is violating their right to free speech.

Coulter has said she might come to Berkeley on Thursday anyway. The university says it's bracing for possible violence whether she shows up or not.

Protests on the Berkeley campus that stopped a speech of right-wing commentator Milo Yiannopoulos on Feb. 1 resulted in injuries to six people and three arrests. Prosecutors have declined to press charges in two of those cases, the school said.