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Will lawsuit affect superintendent choice?

Board expected to fill job after Friday interviews

Trisha Powell Crain tcrain@al.com

By the end of the day Friday, Alabama should have a new schools chief, the third permanent superintendent in a little more than two years. And for the third time in a row, Jefferson County Superintendent Craig Pouncey applied for that top job.

Things are different this time around, though. Pouncey is locked in a defamation lawsuit against Alabama Board of Education member Mary Scott Hunter, R-Huntsville. And Hunter is one of those who will vote on the next leader of the state’s department of education. Whether the battle between the two will have any impact on Pouncey’s chances remains to be seen.

“I don’t consider the appointment of the superintendent to be an issue with the lawsuit or vice versa,” attorney Kenneth Mendelsohn said. Pouncey has no plans to change or drop the lawsuit, Mendelsohn said, regardless of whether he is appointed superintendent.

Cumberland School of Law Professor John L. Carroll told AL.com he sees the two issues, the lawsuit and Pouncey’s candidacy for the position of superintendent, as “two parallel but very separate tracks.”

“The facts are very unusual,” Carroll said. “The lawsuit really is a personal lawsuit about his good name and what happened to him,” he said. “The other (issue) is ‘I’m trying to become state superintendent.’”

In the lawsuit, filed in February of 2017, Pouncey alleges Hunter and Alabama State Department of Education attorney James Ward defamed Pouncey to keep him from being named state superintendent in August 2016. The case is set for trial in December after attempts at mediation failed.

Mendelsohn said, “I don’t think (the lawsuit) should be a factor one way or another” on the board’s consideration of Pouncey for the state superintendent’s position. Pouncey has a right to file the lawsuit, he said, adding, “I would hope the board and the Governor would not let that be a factor.”

Questions are also being raised about whether Hunter can be fair and impartial given Pouncey’s lawsuit against her.

Hunter is one of eight elected board members. They and Gov. Kay Ivey, who serves as board president because of her position, will vote on one of four finalists after interviews are conducted Friday.

In addition to Pouncey, the other finalists are School Superintendents of Alabama Executive Director Eric Mackey, Hoover City Schools Superintendent Kathy Murphy and former Texas Education Commissioner Robert Scott.

After Pouncey was named a finalist on April 13, Hunter said, “I’m not aware of any reason to recuse myself, and I’m not planning to do that.”

Hunter, first elected to the board in 2010, is not running for re-election to her board seat. She will face a primary challenge in June for the District 7 Senate seat representing Madison County in north Alabama. Her term on the board ends in January.

Mendelsohn said it wasn’t his or Pouncey’s call to ask Hunter to recuse herself from the final decision Friday. “If she thinks she can be fair on it,” he said, “then that’s only a call for her to make.”

Carroll said this could be seen as similar to when there is a concern over whether judges can be impartial in a case that comes before them, the judge will typically recuse themselves. With no governing regulations addressing this situation, Carroll said, “I think it really is a good opportunity to look back when all of this is said and done at what changes the state agency might want to make.”
The superintendent job

By the end of the day Friday, the Alabama Board of Education is expected to make its pick for the next superintendent of Alabama schools. Here's a little more about the four remaining candidates and the job they want.

THE JOB

The Alabama State superintendent of education is appointed by the nine members of the board. Eight of the elected positions are by district. The ninth spot goes to the governor, who serves as president.

THE EXPECTATIONS

Board members determined the criteria — what they want in the next state superintendent. Of note is the requirement stating, "proven skills in working with political leaders at the state level." This is one area interim state Superintendent Ed Richardson continually harps on when talking with board members: No one has been managing the relationship between lawmakers and the Department of Education. And lawmakers determine how much money Alabama's K-12 schools get on an annual basis.

THE CANDIDATES

**Eric Mackey**

*Current position:* Executive director of the School Superintendents of Alabama (Montgomery), a state-level advocacy and membership group composed of local superintendents in Alabama

*References on application:* Matt Akin, superintendent, Huntsville City Schools; Karen DeLano, Auburn City Schools; Jeff Goodwin, Oxford City Schools; John Heard, superintendent, Perry County Schools

**Kathy Murphy**

*Current position:* Superintendent, Hoover City Schools

*References on application:* Ruth Ash, retired deputy superintendent, Alabama Department of Education; Jack Hawkins, chancellor, Troy University; Patricia Black, president, Monroe County School Board; Beth Chapman, Alabama secretary of state emeritus

**Warren (Craig) Pouncey**

*Current position:* Superintendent, Jefferson County Schools

*References on application:* Martha Peek, superintendent, Mobile County Schools; Dennis Coe, retired director of office of supporting programs, Alabama Department of Education; Sen. Hank Sanders, D-Seima; Sen. Jabo Waggoner, R-Vestavia Hills

**Robert Scott**

*Current position:* Principal, Texas Star Alliance, an integrated public affairs firm with offices in Austin and Houston, Texas. The position of principal is to provide "strategic counsel to state and national clients on education issues," according to the application.

*References on application:* Mike Moses, consultant and former commissioner of education; David Thompson, partner; Todd Webster, consultant; Terry Grier, former superintendent, Houston (Texas) Independent School District

— Trish Crain
Alabama to get $100 million fire safety attraction

William Thornton  wthornton@al.com

Pelham was chosen as the site for a one-of-a-kind interactive center aimed at informing the public about safety.

The National Center for Fire and Life Safety and the National Fire Protection Association announced Wednesday the NFPA Heroes Experience, the first public fire and life safety education attraction of its kind, will be built in Pelham.

The $100 million, 100,000-square-foot center will be bordered by I-65, Shelby County Road S2 and Alabama 31.

A groundbreaking is expected to take place in 2019, with opening set for 2021.

Boston’s Verner Johnson is the architecture firm designing the project, and BRC Imagination Art, which has been involved in projects from the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, will design the visitor’s experience.

In addition, the Jim Henson Co. will be involved in designing the children’s area, and the center’s mascot. Organizers plan to spend the next year fundraising.

Russell Jackson, CEO of NCFLS, said the center will be “100 percent education and 100 percent showmanship.” The Pelham site was chosen because of its topography and its proximity to the I-65 corridor, aiming for

The National Center for Fire and Life Safety and the National Fire Protection Association selected a site in Pelham for the NFPA Heroes Experience. The National Center for Fire and Life Safety

The center will be a public nonprofit attraction for K-12 school groups and families and tourists.

Jackson said one other reason for Pelham’s selection is Alabama’s position among the leading states for fire-related deaths.

Life safety is aimed at preventing accidental deaths, which can cover everything from poisoning to electrocution to ladder safety. Unintentional injuries were the third leading cause of death in the United States in 2016, and the leading cause of death for Americans from birth to age 44.

Pelham Mayor Gary Waters said the city is thrilled and honored to be home to the center.

"Knowing that our city will make a direct impact on public life safety education nationwide is quite auspicious," Waters said in a statement. "We are proud to partner with the NFPA and the NCFLS, and we believe the City of Pelham will continue to grow and flourish with the addition of this project."
As problems overwhelm the state, Ivey panders

Alabama has a full-blown overcrowding crisis in its prisons and our leaders in Montgomery have done little but put a Band-Aid on the problem. If they don’t do more — and quickly — a federal judge is going to step in and order that criminals be released long before their sentences are up. And any fix by the courts certainly will cost Alabama taxpayers much more than if Montgomery fixed the problem first.

Our state’s public schools continue to underperform. In some areas of the state, including Montgomery, the problem is so bad it is hard to imagine how it could get much worse. The situation is also making it difficult to improve the state’s efforts at workforce development. Addressing both of these concerns is crucial if the state is going to make progress in economic development and job growth.

We have a looming budget crisis. The embarrassing list of elected officials charged and convicted of crimes continues to grow each year. Rural hospitals are closing all around the state, making the trip for emergency care dangerously long in many areas.

In short, Alabama has no shortage of serious, pressing problems.

Most of the top candidates in this year’s gubernatorial election shared their ideas on how to fix these problems in two recent debates. But Gov. Kay Ivey decided not to participate in either one. Ivey, who ascended from her position as lieutenant governor to the governor’s office last year, after Robert Bentley resigned under scandal, is one of four candidates in the Republican primary.

But instead of sharing her ideas on how to move the state forward, Ivey opted to do more important things, like throw out the first pitch of a minor league baseball game last week. Then, on Tuesday, she aired a campaign ad touting a law that prohibits the removal of Confederate monuments.

Instead of addressing any of the important issues impacting the lives of all Alabamians, Ivey slams politicians’ favorite boogeyman, “special interests,” and decries “political correctness” in the ad. After decades as a politician, Ivey pointed to her decision to sign the Alabama Memorial Preservation Act last May — the legislation was sponsored by Sen. Gerald Allen, R-Tuscaloosa — as a reason to elect her to a full term. Surely, she has something more than that to offer us.

Whatever your position is on Confederate memorials, most reasonable Alabamians would have to agree that the chunks of granite, metal plaques and molds of cement have little impact on the quality of their day-to-day lives. Most people are more concerned with their struggle to make ends meet.

Ivey’s primary opponents — Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle, state Sen. Bill Hightower of Mobile and evangelical leader Scott Dawson — are at least trying to tell Alabama why they want to lead.

Meanwhile, Ivey, thought by most political pundits to be the overwhelming favorite to win the Republican nomination, is pandering. So much for leadership.

She may not be losing ground to her three challengers in the primary, but she should be.
PRE-KINDERGARTEN SYSTEM HONORED

See next page
the only national report on state-funded pre-K programs with detailed information on enrollment, funding, teacher qualifications and quality-related policies.

Alabama's First Class Pre-K program is managed by the Alabama Department of Early Childhood Education, which is a part of the executive department of state government and was established to enable the governor to effectively and efficiently coordinate early learning programs throughout the state.

This department administers the First Class Pre-K program through competitive grants awarded annually. Classrooms are located in public and private schools, child care centers, faith-based centers, Head Start programs and other community-based preschool settings.

"The most important part of a child's learning journey is a solid educational foundation," Gov. Kay Ivey said in the news release.

This year's State of Preschool Yearbook looks at pre-kindergarten programs operating during the 2016-17 school year. That year, at least 14,032 4-year-olds were enrolled in a First Class Pre-K classroom in Alabama.

The Alabama Legislature increased the 2019 budget for this program to $96 million, which will fund an additional 100 classrooms while allowing the Department of Early Childhood Education to ensure teacher pay parity with K-12 public school educators.
The most disproportionately popular college major in Alabama

By: Leada Gore

Choosing a college major is always an important decision and one that can dictate your future career.

Some college majors are more popular than others, however, as a study by employment site Zippia recently discovered. The analysis also found some fields of study are disproportionately popular in certain areas of the country.

Zippia used data from the U.S. Census Bureau to determine the most disproportionately popular college major in each U.S. state. The rankings don't show the most popular or common college majors (those are humanities followed by business) but instead the field of study that is especially popular in each state when compared to other states.

In Alabama, the most disproportionately popular college major was nuclear, industrial radiology and biological technologies. Other states where the same major showed up at the top of the list were Idaho and Tennessee.

Here are the results from every state:

Alabama - Nuclear technologies
Alaska - Geology and Earth science
Arizona - Mining and mineral engineering
Arkansas - Nuclear, Industrial Radiology and Biological Tech
California - Cognitive science and biopsychology
Colorado - Geological and geophysical engineering
Connecticut - Actuarial science
Delaware - Interdisciplinary social studies
Florida - Criminology
Georgia - Early childhood education
Hawaii - Oceanography
Idaho - Nuclear, Industrial Radiology and Biological Tech
Illinois - Actuarial science
Indiana - Mechanical engineering related technology
Iowa - Agriculture production and management

See next page
Kansas - Agricultural science
Kentucky - General agriculture
Louisiana - Petroleum engineering
Maine - Naval architecture and marine engineering
Maryland - Astronomy and astrophysics
Massachusetts - Naval architecture and marine engineering
Michigan - Mechanical engineering related technology
Minnesota - Miscellaneous social studies
Mississippi - Miscellaneous agriculture
Missouri - Miscellaneous agriculture
Montana - Geological and geophysical engineering
Nebraska - Agricultural economics
Nevada - Mining and mineral engineering
New Hampshire - Atmospheric sciences and meteorology
New Jersey - Actuarial sciences
New Mexico - Nuclear engineering
New York - Visual and performing arts
North Carolina - Materials engineering and materials science
North Dakota - Agricultural economics
Ohio - Teacher education
Oklahoma - Petroleum engineering
Oregon - Forestry
Pennsylvania - Information sciences
Rhode Island - Naval architecture and marine engineering
South Carolina - Oceanography
South Dakota - Agriculture production and management

See next page
Tennessee - Nuclear engineering
Texas - Petroleum engineering
Utah - Community and public health
Vermont - Environmental science
Virginia - International relations
Washington - Oceanography
West Virginia - Mining and mineral engineering
Wisconsin - Soil science
Wyoming - Mineral and mineral engineering
The ‘together’
Alabama makes
me right at home

John Archibald
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People ask all the time why I live in Alabama.
I fall back on that old saw from the
late, great editorial writer Ron Casey, who
famously said, “If you want fine wine, go
to France. If you want to write editorials,
come to Alabama.”

And that’s true. Finding political intrigue
around here is like fishing in a pickle jar. If
you can’t catch a whopper it’s on you.

But that’s not the real answer.
Because none of it has anything to do
with why I stay in Alabama. If I quit my job
tomorrow I’d never think twice about poli-
tics or corruption or the things that drive
me nuts. I’d turn off the TVs and uninstall
Facebook and head for the hills. The Ala-
abama hills.

Or the Black Belt. Or the beach. There are
lots of choices.

And that’s why I live in Alabama.

Because this thing we call Alabama is
many things. And Alabamians are not as
easy to pigeonhole as the world thinks.
I’ve lived here all my life, with brief
exceptions. I lived in Alabaster and Jack-
sonville and Huntsville and Decatur and
Birmingham and Tuscaloosa and Jasper
and back to Birmingham. I have family in
Montgomery and roots in the Black Belt,
where the history of this state lives and dies
right before your eyes.

Huntsville is as different from Birming-
ham as Saturn is to a steel mill. Both are so
unlike Montgomery or Mobile that it’s hard
to imagine they’re in the same state.

And it’s great.

You can taste it in the food, in the white
sauce they sop on barbecue in North Ala-
bama and the red stuff down south. Heck,
the whole notion of barbecue came from a
blending of cultures, from Europeans and
Native Americans and Caribbean and Afri-
can slaves. It is our differences, not our
similarities, that baked our cornbread and
cooked our gumbo.

It’s the same with music. It’s country and
jazz, bluegrass and hip-hop and rhythm
and blues. It’s everything rolled into Mus-
cle Shoals and everything that rolled out in
ways that make the world hum along. Jason
Isbell and Jimmy Buffett and Lionel Richie
and Hank Williams and Nat “King” Cole
and Alabama Shakes and you can’t begin
to name them all and you can’t even figure
out what style to call it because they play
their way and make their way.

That’s Alabama.
I bet I’ve traveled every paved road and
some where paving is in dispute. The voices
are different, and the tastes are different,
and sometimes the accents and even the
values are different. But there are things
that make Alabama Alabama, and things
that make Alabamians Alabamian.

Football, in the fall, and a few things that
are — dare I say it — even more important.

Much of my travels have come in the
wake of disaster, when planes crash or tor-
nadoes rip through churches. When hurri-
canes approach land, or when people hurt
one another. I’ve seen the inequality that
haunts this land, the tale of a hundred cit-
ies that separates us in racial and ethnic
and religious and economic ways. I’ve seen
those things drive us apart, into Alabamas
that cannot tolerate each other, and I’ve
seen them bring us together.

Because in a crisis, we see ourselves as
one. Grief, in this place, brings us together.

Surely. Inevitably. Always.

Those moments hurt so badly, and give
us the hope we need to carry on.

And when we are together — in those
moments that remind us we can be as alike
as we are different — we become strong,
and caring and gracious, and all the hospi-
table things we want to be.

That’s why I’m in Alabama. I know what
we can be.

Archibald writes a regular opinion column
for AL.com.
Our View: Walt Maddox for governor

On June 5th, Alabama voters will have the opportunity to participate in the state’s gubernatorial primary. Both the Republican and Democratic primaries will be on this date, and voters can only participate in one. This editorial board urges Alabamians to support Tuscaloosa Mayor Walt Maddox for the governorship.

Maddox’s platform consists of common-sense solutions to Alabama’s problems. He seeks to improve the job opportunities for Alabamians through workforce training and development and more affordable college opportunities. He wants to start rebuilding Alabama’s crumbling infrastructure, and start a lottery in order to better fund Alabama public schools. He also wants to authorize a $1.8 billion expansion of Medicaid to provide healthcare for hundreds of thousands of Alabamians.

His plan seeks to improve Alabama with practical, tangible reforms. His platform is something all Alabamians can rally behind, no matter the political affiliation. After all, an Alabama with a better-trained workforce, better-educated children, better-built infrastructure and better-cared-for residents will be better for everyone.

His primary Democratic opponent, Sue Bell Cobb, is running on an extremely similar platform, with almost identical plans to improve the state. This editorial board issues our endorsement based on Maddox’s strengths, not as a criticism of Cobb.

Walt Maddox has experience as an executive, running the government of Tuscaloosa for the past thirteen years. Under his leadership, the town has flourished, attracting new businesses and developments and improving its educational system. Maddox was nationally recognized for his handling of the devastating 2011 tornadoes, being named Municipal Leader of the Year by American City and Country in 2012 and being named a fellow with the Program on Crisis Leadership at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government. His leadership skills and commitment to public service have been well-documented during his tenure as mayor.

Montgomery political community, giving them a new voice and in-depth of knowledge of the problems facing Alabama communities.

If Maddox is to win the primary, the choice for him as governor becomes even more clear. He would most likely be running against Kay Ivey should he advance, and her divisive politics would do nothing to further our state. The Governor has refused to participate in any debates with her Republican opponents. She has sowed dog-whistle, blood-and-soil politics about preserving Confederate monuments and “not erasing history.” Her platform, like many of those elected recently into the University’s SGA, lacks specifics and does not present any clear vision for the state.

Ivey represents more of the same. More of the tarnished Republican party of Robert Bentley and Roy Moore, whose crimes have publicly embarrassed Alabama on the national stage too many times. More regressive politics based in racial resentment, and less discussion of issues that tangibly affect voters’ everyday lives.

Maddox represents a path forward, a step away from the lunacy that is the Alabama Republican party. He is a competent, tested leader who will bring Alabamians together instead of driving them apart. He will work tirelessly to discernibly improve the lives of voters in this state, just as he has done in Tuscaloosa for so many years.

Our View represents the consensus of the CW Editorial Board.
Short-term rental service will pay lodging tax

By Jason Morton
Staff Writer

City officials have finalized a tax remission agreement with the nation's primary marketplace for home sharing.

Now, it's looking to make similar agreements with other services.

On Tuesday, the Tuscaloosa City Council finalized a contract with AirBnB.com to collect the city's 11 percent short-term rental lodging tax — 5.5 percent in the police jurisdiction — and remit those proceeds to the city on a monthly basis.

Associate City Attorney Scott B. Holmes told the council that, based on AirBnB's estimates, those proceeds would've totaled about $40,000 in fiscal 2016 and $80,000 in fiscal 2017 had they been collected.

"I would expect it to be increased or leveled" in fiscal 2018, Holmes said.

The deal also means the city will have access to data showing which nights and periods are most popular while also allowing officials to compare data showing which operators are licensed to act as a short-term renter and those who are operating outside the scope of the law.

"It's certainly good for us," Holmes said of the arrangement.

With Tuesday's approval of this agreement, the city now will attempt to work out a similar agreement with VRBO.com and other services that link short-term renters with willing property owners.

In a short-term rental, a property owner or tenant leases a room or an entire living space to someone for a night, a weekend, or sometimes a week or longer.

Various websites — among them AirBnB.com and VRBO.com — act as the liaison between renter and property owner.

Last year, when the City Council first adopted the regulations, the city established two areas called "Tourist Overlay Districts" — one around Lake Tuscaloosa, the other in the downtown residential area bordered by the Black Warrior River, McFarland Boulevard, 15th Street and 29th Avenue — where

See AIRBNB, B3
some properties would be allowed to operate “by right,” meaning without the need for special permission.

Property owners outside these districts can ask the Zoning Board of Adjustment for permission to use their homes to provide the same service, but the requirements these residents will have to meet make obtaining that permission almost impossible.

On April 3, the City Council advanced a series of modifications to the initial set of short-term rental guidelines. Among them is allowing those in the city’s 16 downtown historic districts the right to rent their properties for up to 30 days a year.

Those licensed to conduct the practice also will have the option to seek an additional 30 days per year from the city’s Zoning Board of Adjustment.

But while the proposed changes, which will come up for a final vote next month, relaxed the cap limit from 3 percent to 50 percent on the amount of condominium units can be rented out of a particular development — multi-family developments, like apartments, will go from 3 percent to 10 percent — the council made no adjustments to the cap limits in the historic districts.

Each historic district is limited to a 10 percent cap on residential properties that can operate as a short-term rental. This means that no more than 64 homes of the more than 600 parcels in the historic districts — at least 246 of which are owner-occupied — could be rented out to visitors.

Despite these license caps, not every historic district has reached its limit. The Druid City historic district, for example, can have up to 20 short-term rental license holders, but only two property owners had obtained licenses as of April 3.

Likewise, of the five licenses allowed for Pinehurst, just one had been issued and eight historic districts haven’t issued any short-term rental licenses, according to City Hall data compiled when the proposed changes were introduced.

But some, like Audubon Place, have issued all four short-term rental licenses allowed under its cap and four property owners are on a wait list. So, too, has the Eighth Street historic district reached its one-license limit. One property owner is on a waitlist to be considered.

Each license lasts for two years, but city officials are aware that some of these licenses have been granted to “squatters,” or property owners who have obtained the license with no intention of renting out their property in order to prevent others in their neighborhood from doing so.

To combat this, one of the amendments will require those seeking to renew their license to submit to an audit to prove that they are, in fact, using the license as intended.

Reach Jason Morton at jason.morton@tuscaloosanews.com or 205-722-0200.
NCAA

Group supports two changes to transfer rules

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The NCAA Transfer Working Group maintains “strong support” for proposals to stop schools from restricting where athletes can transfer and to allow athletes who sign National Letters of Intent to transfer and play immediately should their head coach leave, continues to discuss allowing all athletes to transfer and play immediately if they reach a benchmark grade-point average but membership is “deeply divided” on a proposal for graduate transfers in men’s basketball.

Members of the NCAA Transfer Working Group, which met earlier this week, have been mulling various changes to transfer rules for the past year. The proposal to prevent schools from restricting where athletes can transfer will be voted on by the NCAA Division I Council in June.

“We have strong support from the membership for allowing student-athletes to transfer and be recruited without losing their scholarships,” Transfer Working Group chair and South Dakota State athletic director Justin Sell said in a statement. “We will ask the Division I Council to move forward with a vote on that proposal in June. This is meaningful change that will benefit student-athletes, schools and coaches.”

How drastic will changes be to NCAA transfer rules?
Restricting transfers is common practice among Power 5 conference football and basketball programs, including Alabama and Auburn.

Typically, most coaches prevent athletes wishing to transfer from going elsewhere in the conference and to schools on the schedule for the next year or two, though there have been instances of much more extensive restrictions.

The discussion continues regarding allowing all athletes to transfer and play immediately if they have a benchmark GPA, which “has not yet been determined but would be between 3.0 and 3.5,” according to the NCAA.

Another option was to eliminate the one-time transfer exception in sports that allow transfers to play immediately.

An NCAA release states it will refer to the Conference Commissioners Association (CCA), which governs the NLI, to permit athletes to transfer and play immediately should they sign an NLI and their head coach leaves, including even if the athlete enrolls in class and begins practicing but the coach leaves before the season.

“The working group believes all students who haven’t begun the academic year or competitive season should have the ability to transfer and play immediately,” according to an NCAA release.

The forthcoming report from the Commission on College Basketball, headed by Condoleezza Rice, is expected next week and also will affect the Transfer Working Group’s views on college basketball.

A proposal from the Atlantic 10 Conference calls for graduate transfers in men’s basketball to count against a team’s scholarship limit (13) for the duration of the graduate program they enroll in. Since graduate transfers usually have only one year of eligibility remaining, this potential change would create a new challenge for coaches and programs looking to fill out their rosters with veteran players.

The NCAA notes “opinion was deeply divided” on the proposal (2017-SS), which would go into effect Aug. 1, 2019 if approved by the Division I Council.

James Crepea is an Auburn beat reporter for Alabama Media Group. Follow him on Twitter @JamesCrepea.
AL.com's John Archibald wins 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Commentary

By: Staff

John Archibald, long the voice of the aggrieved in Alabama, has won the Pulitzer Prize for commentary for his writing about Alabama politics in a year marked by trouble atop all three branches of state government and a dramatic U.S. Senate race that ended in an upset victory by Democrat Doug Jones over conservative judge Roy Moore.

On Dec. 12, the day of the special Senate election, Archibald appealed to voters in his own direct style: "Thinking of the world watching Alabama right now is like hearing an unexpected knock on the door when you haven't done the dishes. ... The world is watching. And what it sees will have consequences. Vote your heart. Vote your conscience. But know what it means. To the world, and to you."

Dana Canedy, administrator of the Pulitzers, cited Archibald's "lyrical and courageous commentary rooted in Alabama but has a national resonance in scrutinizing corrupt politicians, championing the rights of women and calling out hypocrisy." [Spelling of Canedy's name corrected at 2:49 p.m.]

John began writing for The Birmingham News in 1986 and has provided commentary for the newspaper and AL.com since 2004. He most often focuses on Alabama and Birmingham politics, but he does so with a unique blend of humor and outrage. And he is often pulled to write about day-to-day topics and ordinary people, those who exist outside the corruption and hypocrisy he has dedicated decades to revealing.

In addition to his work on the biggest political stories of 2017, Archibald's investigative work and commentary in 2017 also led to the guilty plea of former state lawmaker Oliver Robinson in a bribery scandal that produced indictments of two attorneys and a coal company executive. Those federal cases are still working their way through the legal system. As last year's many political dramas unfolded, Archibald joined Reckon by AL.com, the company's new public interest news and commentary brand focused on human rights issues and reader engagement. The new team placed Archibald in a position to tackle familiar subjects in new ways, working with investigative reporters, social producers and videographers, including Archibald's son, Ramsey Archibald, who earned a Master's Degree in journalism from the University of Alabama in 2015. He has often teamed with fellow columnist Kyle Whitmire, collaborating on investigative reporting and aiming a blowtorch at the toes of Alabama politicians when they misstep.

As a winner of the commentary prize, Archibald joins some of the most famous voices in American journalism, including: Peggy Noonan of the Wall Street Journal; Thomas Friedman, Maureen Dowd, Nicholas D. Kristof, Anna Quindlen and William Safire of The New York Times; Connie Schultz of The Plain Dealer of Cleveland; and Jimmy Breslin of the New York Daily News.

The prize is the third in the company's history.
In 2007, Brett Blackledge of The Birmingham News won the Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting for his exposure of cronyism and corruption in the state's two-year college system. The Birmingham News also earned the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing in 1991 for commentary and analysis about Alabama's unfair and inadequate tax system.

The son of a Methodist minister, Archibald was born in Alabaster and lived in several towns in North Alabama before his family settled in Birmingham. He graduated from the University of Alabama with a journalism degree in 1986.

That background provided the foundation for his journalism, which skewers hypocrisy and greed in both political parties. In June, he wrote: "It doesn't matter which party is in charge, because it's always the same. It's a protection racket, a cycle of corruption, propaganda and greed. Alabamians are left to kick themselves beneath the table. And the guy who started off with the bag of money walks away with more."

His work instead often tends to champion common, simple Alabama values, such as decency and honesty. In short, his work is inseparable from his Alabama roots.

As he wrote in a December column, which criticized Roy Moore's use of religion: "See, the church was the single most defining part of my life, and that of my family. My dad, Robert Archibald Jr., was a United Methodist preacher. And so was his dad, Robert Sr. There were preachers and Roberts - my oldest son is a Robert, too - back generations, and centuries."

And as he wrote in a column in August arguing against the focus on preserving Civil War monuments: "I'm as Southern as anyone, Alabama born and bred and I'm proud enough of the South to want it to do better. But it's time to look away from Dixie. To a future for everyone."

That kind of thinking about a Deep South with room for all people fueled his writing about Brandi Burgess, the daughter of one of the south's most popular radio hosts who revealed that she was bisexual in a column published by AL.com.

Archibald wrote, "Brandi's could be the story of thousands of LGBTQ men and women born to evangelical families. It's one of guilt and shame and a kind of eventual courage. But she knows love and acceptance and faith build courage. She was raised in the church and holds to a profound belief in God. But her God is vast and complex and hard to limit. So in the shadow of one of Alabama's largest voices, she has found her own."

Among the columns submitted for the Pulitzer Prize were two standing up for women in the wake of the #MeToo movement, including those who came forward in the Roy Moore scandal:

"This is a moment, I keep believing. It's a cultural awakening and the start of a change. We fail when we say boys will be boys. We hurt when we question what a woman wore when she was assaulted. Those who blame the victims - who call them whores and tramps and sluts - are as guilty as those who commit the acts. It's not just about the past. It's about the future. So forget about politics, for now. This is bigger than that."

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Michelle Holmes, VP of Content for the Alabama Media Group, said: "John's signature outrage comes because he believes the people of Alabama deserve better. His desire to root out corruption comes because he believes the little guy needs someone looking out after him in a state where bad things happen behind closed doors. His desire to hold a light for those in darkness comes from his belief that this place should shine with beauty and goodness, not with despair."

Archibald lives in Birmingham with his wife, Alecia, and three dogs, Benny, Betsy and Barney. John and Alecia have three children, Drew, who lives in Washington D.C., and Ramsey and Mamie, who live in Birmingham.
UA Secures Home-and-Home With Irish
See SABAN. AS

Saban makes list of greatest leaders

PITTSBURGH — The CEO of Saban Communications, the company that makes the hit TV show "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," has been named one of the world's 50 greatest leaders.

Saban, who is also the founder of the Saban School of Entrepreneurship, was awarded the 2006 Crystal Award for Entrepreneurship by Entrepreneur magazine.

"Saban is a true visionary," said Entrepreneur magazine editor-in-chief Steve Levitt. "He has created a company that is not only successful, but also has a strong social responsibility."
above Emmanuel Macron, the president of France. Apple CEO Tim Cook, a graduate of Auburn University, ranks two spots beneath Saban. This isn't the first time Saban has made Fortune's list of World's Greatest Leaders. In 2016, the UA coach was ranked No. 11. Saban did not make Fortune's 2017 list.

Terrin Waack contributed to this report.

Fortune's 2018 list of greatest leaders

1. The students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas and other schools
2. Bill and Melinda Gates, cofounders of Gates Foundation
3. The #MeToo Movement
4. Moon Jae-in, president of South Korea
5. Kenneth Frazier, CEO of Merck
6. Scott Gottlieb, Food and Drug Administration commissioner
7. Margarethe Vestager, commissioner for competition, European Union
8. Larry Fink, CEO of BlackRock
9. Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
10. Liu He, vice premier of China
11. Mary Barra, CEO of General Motors
12. Nick Saban, football coach of the University of Alabama
13. Emmanuel Macron, president of France
14. Tim Cook, CEO of Apple
15. Serena Williams, athlete
16. Isabelle Kocher, CEO of Engie
17. Katie Bethell, executive director of PL+US
18. Ryan Coogler, film director
19. Huateng “Pony” Ma, CEO of Tencent
20. Indira Jaising, founder of the Lawyers Collective
21. Marc Benioff, CEO of Salesforce
22. The gymnasts and their allies
23. Kathleen McLaughlin, chief sustainability officer of Walmart
24. Mukesh Ambani, chairman and managing director of Reliance Industries
25. Mick Cornett, former mayor of Oklahoma City
26. Donald Hopkins, physician at the Carter Center
27. Oprah Winfrey, CEO of OWN
28. Mitch Landrieu, mayor of New Orleans
29. Jacinda Ardern, prime minister of New Zealand
30. Ma Jun, environmentalist in China
31. West Virginia teachers
32. Leymah Gbowee, president of the Gbowee Peace Foundation
33. Jamie Dimon, CEO of JPMorgan Chase
34. Michael Sorrell, president of Paul Quinn College
35. Reese Witherspoon, actor/producer
36. Daniel Servitje Montull, CEO of Grupo Bimbo
37. Izumi Nakamitsu, undersecretary general for disarmament at the United Nations
38. Bashar Masri, founder of Rawabi
39. Leila de Lima, senator in the Philippines
40. Angela Nyambura Gichaga, CEO of Financing Alliance for Health
41. Timothy Keller, evangelical minister/author at Redeemer City to City
42. Gwynne Shotwell, president and chief operating officer at SpaceX
43. Balkrishna Doshi, architect in India
44. Feike Sijbesma, CEO of DSM
45. Kelly Chibale, scientist in South Africa
46. Ana Botín, group executive chairman at Banco Santander
47. Dina Meza, journalist at PEN Honduras
48. Rizwan Kamil, mayor of Bandung, Indonesia
49. Amy Gutmann, president of the University of Pennsylvania
50. Ed Bastian, CEO of Delta Air Lines
Post-game party planned

Staff report

Fans in Tuscaloosa for Saturday's A-Day spring football game are invited to a post-game crawfish boil and block party.

The Beans and Brews Block Party and the Claws for a Cause crawfish boil will be from 4-10 p.m. Saturday, hosted by UPerk and Loosa Brews at the corner of University Boulevard and 20th Avenue downtown.

The event will include live music, community art displays, and fresh crawfish. For those who don't want crawfish, La Mexicana and Battered Wild food trucks will be on-site to provide eating alternatives.

Admission is free. A portion of proceeds from food sales will benefit Raise the Roof for Sonya, a Habitat for Humanity Tuscaloosa project.

The project aims to build a new home for Sonya Kemp, a Tuscaloosa native whose home was damaged by the 2011 tornado.

Unlike most Habitat projects, this initiative is being orchestrated entirely by students at the University of Alabama. UA students are involved in every level, from the physical construction of the house to collecting the donations needed to reach the initiative's $100,000 goal.

For more information about the Raise the Roof for Sonya initiative, email Habitat for Humanity Tuscaloosa Executive Director Ellen Potts at ellen@habittattuscaloosa.org.
Nick Saban receives Boy Scouts award for community work

By: Drew Taylor

Josh Maxson made sure everything was ready for Nick Saban.

At the Embassy Suites in downtown Tuscaloosa on Wednesday, Maxson approached Bill Gosselin, chief executive officer of the Boy Scouts of America’s Black Warrior Council, moments before the Crimson Tide football coach was to be honored by the Black Warrior Council with the Circle of Honor award.

“Where’s coach supposed to go when he gets here?” Maxson asked. “Does he sit with us?”

“Table 18,” Gosselin said, pointing to a table near the stage. “Dr. (Robert) Witt is sitting there.”

Maxson, assistant athletics director in football communications for the University of Alabama, was soon checking his phone for the latest update on when Saban would arrive. With his day-to-day duties and A-Day coming up this weekend, Saban’s time was limited.

“He’s out the door,” Maxson said a little after noon.

As people ate lunch in the ballroom, Maxson and others were waiting for Saban. Fifteen minutes later, a Mercedes-Benz pulled up to the side entrance of the hotel. After being parked for a moment, Saban got out, followed by UA athletics relations coordinator Cedric Burns. The man of honor had arrived.

Walking into the ballroom, Saban greeted people at his table and nearby tables. After exchanging pleasantries, Saban met with Witt, president emeritus of the university, and sat at his table. This time last year, Saban took time to present Witt with the the Circle of Honor.

“A major part of the reason the University of Alabama is where it is today is due to the fact that 11 years ago, coach Saban joined us,” Witt said. “A major reason our community is the type of community it is is because Nick and Terry have made it their home.”

Gosselin said Saban was a perfect candidate for the award, which is given to people who do work in the community that reflects the spirit of the Boy Scouts. Specifically, Gosselin mentioned the Nick’s Kids Foundation, which Saban and his wife, Terry, founded in 1998. The foundation has provided more than $6 million to local charities to date.

In addition, Saban has also been involved in Habitat for Humanity. Last month, he and several football players helped build a house on Juanita Drive.

“You talk to his players and when you hear them talk about his integrity, loyalty and passion for them to be successful in life, he’s a perfect fit to honor at this event,” Gosselin said.

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Although he was never a Boy Scout, Saban relates to many aspects of the group’s code.

“A lot of people ask me ‘How do you win?’ I think we win because we have a great team, but I also think we have a lot of people who promote the principles and values that can help our players be successful,” he said.

Specifically, Saban pointed to how with his team, he wants to create an environment where every player has the chance to be successful in whatever they choose to do in life, on or off the field. For him, a major part of that is instilling discipline.

“We all have to get somewhere between feeling and choice,” he said. “Do we do what we feel like doing or are we going to choose to do the things that we need to do to be successful, to accomplish the goals that we have? That’s something we really try to promote in our program.”

Talking about Nick’s Kids, Saban made it clear who the real force behind it was.

“I have to give Miss Terry an awful lot of credit for all the stuff that we do in the community because most of it is certainly her idea,” he said. “My part is to make sure it gets paid for.”

Thanking the Boy Scouts, Saban returned to the table as Witt gave closing remarks. Witt informed the audience that the council had raised $232,480 through the luncheon that day. Proceeds from the lunch will be used to expand Boy Scout programs, start groups in at-risk communities and develop scholarships.

Before the lunch was over, Saban was already out the door.
Interstate construction could slow A-Day traffic

**UA suggests alternate routes for gameday**

*Staff report*

Fans traveling to Tuscaloosa for the A-Day game Saturday are advised to watch for construction areas and lane closures that could affect traffic flow.

Construction has begun on Interstate 209 in Tuscaloosa County and motorists can expect narrow lanes and reduced speed limits, which could cause delays Saturday as thousands of fans are expected to arrive. Fans traveling on Interstate 209 are advised to use the Alabama Highway 216 route at exit 100 or the Cottondale route at exit 79.

Post-game traffic could be slowed by a left turn lane closure on McFarland Boulevard S. at the I-209 N ramp. For detailed pre- and post-game traffic maps, go to www.uagameday.com.

On-campus parking is free for A-Day. Some areas are reserved for Tide Pride donors and students. Parking maps are also available at www.uagameday.com.

The Crimson Ride Transit System will offer free shuttle from the parking lots on the east side of campus to Bryant-Denny Stadium.

The shuttles begin at 7 a.m. and stop running 90 minutes after the game.

Also, fans should remember the clear bag policy will be in effect for Saturday’s game.

Bags and purses carried into the stadium “must be clear plastic, vinyl or PVC, and cannot exceed 12 inches by 6 inches by 12 inches in size,” according to the policy, which also allows clutch purses that do not exceed 4½ inches by 6½ inches, with or without a handle or strap.
Racial speaker won’t visit UA

White nationalist had been set to appear Thursday

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

A Thursday event at the University of Alabama featuring a white nationalist speaker has been canceled after the student group hosting the event had its status as a campus organization withdrawn.

Jared Taylor, the editor of the online “American Renaissance” website, was originally scheduled to give a talk Thursday titled “Diversity: Is it Good for America?” Taylor was invited by the student group Students for America First.

The university and the group confirmed Monday the event had been canceled.

“Students for America First does not currently meet the registered

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student organization requirements. Consistent with UA policy, the group’s registered status has been withdrawn, and its proposed event this week will not go forward. Prior to having its registered status withdrawn and becoming inactive, the group had an opportunity to comply with the requirements of a registered UA student organization, but was unable to do so,” according to a campus-wide message released Monday.

Students for America First’s registration was withdrawn because it no longer met the requirements of a registered student organization, including the requirement of having a full-time UA faculty or staff member serving as its advisor, said UA spokesman Chris Bryant.

“This content-neutral policy applies to all student groups, regardless of a group’s views or the substance of its proposed event. As previously stated, the University is committed to free speech, which is evident in the wide array of viewpoints our registered student organizations have recently brought to campus,” according to the university statement on Monday.

The group called the action by the university “illegal” and said it plans to contact a civil rights group to challenge decision.

If the group is able to meet the requirements in the future, it would be given the opportunity to re-register as an active organization, according to the university statement.

University of Alabama President Stuart Bell issued a statement last month in response to the invitation affirming the campus’ commitment to diversity and inclusion. Bell said the university could not restrict free speech and encouraged students not to attend the event.

Taylor’s website includes a statement of belief that race and racial conflict are among the chief challenges of the Western world and, in order to understand the issues, the aspects of race must be studied as part of an approach they call race realism.

The Southern Poverty Law Center describes him as “a courtly presenter of ideas that most would describe as crudely white supremacist — a kind of modern-day version of the refined but racist colonialist of old.”

The student group issued a statement last month saying it neither endorsed nor condemned Taylor’s work, but cast its decision to bring him to UA as a free speech issue.
Ability Career Fair this Wednesday at UAH

By: WAFF 48 Digital Staff

HUNTSVILLE, AL (WAFF) - A career fair coming to Huntsville will give those with disabilities the chance to meet potential employers.

The University of Alabama at Huntsville (UAH) and the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) will host the 3rd annual Ability Career Fair on Wednesday.

“We believe in the mission of connecting employers and persons with disabilities,” said Lisa Carter Rivers, a human resources specialist at UAH.

Gently used clothing will also be available at the workshop for attendees who need business attire.

“We want to give people with disabilities every opportunity to succeed while looking for work.” said Phyllis Barrett, ADRS Unit Supervisor.

Employers will interview prospective employees at the career fair. Workshops will also be conducted.

The Ability Career Fair will be at UAH’s Conference Training Center, 1410 Ben Graves Dr., on April 18 from 8 a.m. to noon.

This event is being sponsored by ADRS, Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind (AIDB), North Alabama Society for Human Resource Management (NASHRM), Phoenix and UAH.

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OUR VIEW

Alcohol sales — coming to a stadium near you

According to national reports, the NCAA is expected to bring an end to a long-standing prohibition on alcohol sales at its championship events. The NCAA Division I Council is expected to vote this week on a proposal to abolish the alcohol ban.

The move comes after the council has used a waiver the past two years to sell alcohol at some championship competitions, such as the College World Series in Omaha, Nebraska. The waivers would no longer be necessary if the council approves the proposal during meetings in Indianapolis this week.

But that doesn’t necessarily mean that you’ll be able to grab a beer at the concession stand at Bryant-Denny Stadium any time soon. And if you want an adult drink to calm your nerves while watching the Tide roll to another SEC title in Atlanta, you’ll likely have to sneak a flask of bourbon into the stadium. That is because the SEC still has a ban on stadium-wide alcohol sales.

There’s a push by some SEC schools to overturn that ban. LSU, Texas A&M and Auburn are a few of the schools that would like to see the league change its policy. Texas A&M and Auburn opened beer gardens in their baseball stadiums this season. Auburn’s Plainsman Park received a special retail license from the Auburn City Council so that the beer sales could begin on what they call the Plainsman Patio. It costs $5 dollars on top of your ticket fee to gain entry onto the patio, where you can then purchase a beer. The beer must be consumed on the patio and fans can’t leave the designated area. LSU began experimenting with alcohol sales in Tiger Stadium this past football season at select locations outside of skyboxes and suites. But all of these new alcohol sales are happening in designated spaces and are not stadium-wide.

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Of course, at Bryant-Denny, one can purchase a ticket to The Zone, where a locker can be rented for the purpose of housing your beverage of choice. And there’s booze aplenty in many of the skyboxes. But this also involves restricted access to those willing to pay more for tickets where they can bring their own booze without having to sneak it in.

Other universities in other conferences have been selling alcohol stadium-wide for years, and cashing big checks as a result. Even Wake Forest University, a North Carolina school with Southern Baptist roots, began stadium-wide alcohol sales in 2016.

Anyone who has attended a football game here knows booze and beer flow like the Black Warrior River through town on game day. Allowing it to be sold inside the stadium is not likely to result in more drunks. If anything, it might cut down on the binge drinking that happens before kick-off. If cold beer is available it also might cut down on harder liquor that was snuck in with mini bottles and flasks.

There is more money to be made. If the change doesn’t happen this year, it will soon.
Sankey discusses in-stadium alcohol sale policy

Tom Green tgreen@al.com

Auburn celebrated the grand opening of "Plainsman Patio" on March 13 at Plainsman Park, giving the university one of the few athletic venues within the SEC that permits the sale of alcohol.

The SEC currently prohibits the sale of alcohol in general admission seating areas, though some league schools have taken steps to make alcohol more accessible in venues in recent years. SEC commissioner Greg Sankey said Monday while speaking at the APSE Southeast Region meeting in Birmingham that he and SEC member institutions continue to have "healthy dialogue" regarding the league's current policy and whether changes should be made moving forward.

"We've had some of that (dialogue) continue," Sankey said. "We've seen some adjustments."

Plainsman Park became one of the latest SEC venues to permit limited alcohol sales, though before Auburn could open the gates to Plainsman Patio — the fenced-off area down the right-field line at Plainsman Park where the sale of alcohol has been permitted during certain games this season — the school's athletic department had to first submit a comprehensive plan to the SEC offices.

According to Sankey, Auburn — as any league school would have to — provided "a plan that meets the expectation on oversight, private area and controlled space for review" to the league office before they could begin the sale of alcohol at select baseball games this season.

Back on Feb. 20, Auburn City Council voted to approve a special retail license to B and B Bartending to permit the sale of alcohol in a designated area at Plainsman Park. The move made Auburn's baseball stadium one of the few athletic venues within the SEC that sells alcohol in select locations outside of skyboxes and suites, something LSU experimented with this past season at Tiger Stadium with its Skyline Club, while Texas A&M has a beer garden at Blue Bell Park with a similar $5 entry fee to Plainsman Patio.
Report puts Hurts' future in question

Michael Casagrande mcasagrande@al.com

The story caught headlines Thursday morning with Jalen Hurts' dad discussing the possibility of a transfer.

After Alabama's 14th practice of the spring, Alabama coach Nick Saban met with reporters in a previously scheduled news conference.

Saban said he met with Hurts' father after Saturday's scrimmage and they had a good conversation.

"I think we all want the same thing for players who compete on our team, regardless of position," Saban said. "Even though there's going to be a significant effort on a lot of folks' part in this room obviously, want to make this a very public, thing. But it's going to be handled in a very private matter. In our conversation, I was very positive and upbeat. Jalen has done a great job. He's made a significant amount of improvement. His dad was very positive."

In the Bleacher Report story, Averion Hurts indicated his son could transfer if he doesn't win the starting quarterback job.

"Well, he'd be the biggest free agent in college football history," Averion Hurts told Bleacher Report.

"At the end of the day, everybody has career decisions that

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they have to make," Saban said. "Nobody knows what the outcome of this situation will bring. We don't want any player not to be able to fill their goals and aspirations in our program here. We don't want that for any of our players. Jalen's dad has always been very positive and supportive in every conversation that I had."

"So I'm not really concerned with what somebody else chose to write because I'm always sort of use the personal communication that I have with our player, Jalen and his family when necessary. And I have a lot of trust and respect for those folks. And I don't think there's an issue or problem from my standpoint."

The broken finger that will sideline Tua Tagovailoa only highlights the importance of retaining Hurts. Alabama will have just two scholarship quarterbacks available for Saturday's spring game with Mac Jones getting the reps Hurts doesn't take.

That's why Alabama got a commitment from East Carolina graduate transfer Gardner Minshew. He later flipped and is now going to Washington State.

Saban in March told ESPN he was open to using two quarterbacks in 2018. Saban has also never come out and announced a starter in advance of a season in which there was a question about who would earn the job.

"Coach Saban's job is to do what's best for his team," Averion Hurts told Bleacher Report. "I have no problem with that. My job is to do what's best for Jalen — and make no mistake, Jalen is a quarterback, and he wants to play quarterback. He loves Alabama, loves Coach Saban and everything about that place. But he wants to play, and he will play..."

Michael Casagrande is an Alabama beat writer for the Alabama Media Group. Follow him on Twitter @ByCasagrande or on Facebook.

"Nobody knows what the outcome of this situation will bring."

Nick Saban
NCAA coaches, former players can't take part in practices

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NCAA

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former student-athletes to practice with the current team."

Several teams have been taking part in this practice over the years, most notably Alabama, which brought in former players like Blake Sims and Trent Richardson to prepare for opponents. Clemson also used the practice a few years back when former Tigers quarterback Tajh Boyd was used to prepare the team to face Alabama in 2017.

The group also eliminated restrictions placed on the sale of alcohol at Division I championships. The NCAA had been experimenting with limited sales in general seating at the College World Series and Women's College World Series but also expanded it to the FCS championship and other title games with wrestling, ice hockey and women's volleyball.
Redemption will have to come later for Hugh Freeze

By: Cecil Hurt

Not since Greg McElroy did the pogo along the Florida sideline in the 2009 SEC Championship Game has anyone from Alabama done a balancing act as nimble as Nick Saban’s answer to questions about Hugh Freeze on Tuesday night.

Freeze was a frequently-mentioned and occasionally-seen candidate for a spot on Saban’s staff, or at least the extended staff of analysts and interns, for a month or so after the College Football Playoff championship. But Saban apparently never got clearance to bring Freeze aboard.

Earlier this week, a story from AL.com said Freeze was not hired at Alabama (or LSU or Missouri) due to the recommendation, if not an outright edict from, SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey. The league has a rule that requires “consultation” before hiring a coach with current or pending NCAA issues. Theoretically, a school could ignore the opinion of the league office, but that is almost certainly a hill that few, if any, athletic administrators would choose to die on.

Ultimately, former Tennessee coach Butch Jones, who carries no NCAA baggage, was hired by Saban although there is no absolute reason to think Saban would not have hired both.

When asked about the matter, Saban gave no specifics. Instead, he did what he could to promote Freeze, who will eventually get back into coaching somewhere, presumably for the 2019 season. It is not entirely out of the question he could wind up in Tuscaloosa after all, just 12 months later than expected.

“I have a tremendous amount of respect for Hugh Freeze as a coach,” Saban said Tuesday night in Mobile. “I think he did a fabulous job when he was at Ole Miss. He has been a friend that I’ve shared ideas with and spent time with and know his family… so we have a tremendous amount of respect for him.”

Did that mean Saban was about to go on a tirade about not getting to hire Freeze? Not this time.

“We also have a lot of respect for the SEC and what they think is, in some cases, best for the league relative to circumstances that people created for themselves,” Saban said. “But I have a lot of respect for Hugh, and I think he’ll be back in our profession, and we wish him and his family the very best, and if we can do anything to help him, we’ll be happy to do that.”

That’s about the safest way to play it, and the shrewdest. Saban definitely said more about Freeze than he did about Sankey, but did so without a hint of insubordination.

In some ways, and there is simply no way to avoid this pun, Freeze probably needed a cooling-off period. The repercussions of his Ole Miss tenure haven’t ended, even if the NCAA has given its ruling.

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Former Rebel quarterback Shea Patterson, currently attempting to transfer to Michigan with immediate eligibility, reportedly blasted Freeze as dishonest as part of his appeal to the NCAA eligibility committee. That's more headline fodder, which the league office would like to avoid altogether but certainly doesn't want connected with one of its schools.

What Freeze and those in his camp were looking for was a trip down Lane Kiffin Road. Former commissioner Mike Slive was no fan of Kiffin after his year at Tennessee, but couldn't stop Alabama from hiring Kiffin (whose NCAA problems at UT were not on the same level as those Freeze incurred.)

Kiffin got the job, Alabama won championships, time passed and there was a head coaching job a few years down the line. Freeze could read that road map. He just has to wait a year or so before he can start the journey somewhere, either in the SEC or at another station that is convinced that he can help them win.
How Alabama coach Nick Saban uses the media to talk to his team

By: Rainer Sabin

Inside Alabama's locker room at Bryant-Denny Stadium, the players gathered around Nick Saban to hear the coach's last message of the spring.

It was April, 22, 2017. Saban had just spent the last few hours walking around the field in a blue sport jacket and pressed slacks, evaluating the performance of his team at A-Day.

He had witnessed his top two quarterbacks -- Tua Tagovailoa and Jalen Hurts -- throw for 614 yards. He had seen Alabama's athletic outside linebacker, Terrell Lewis, make an acrobatic interception. Highlights abounded and yet Saban wasn't impressed.

The specter of the program's most crushing defeat in Saban's tenure -- the last-second loss to Clemson in the 2017 College Football Playoff title game -- remained while the season opener against Florida State hovered off in the distance.

Gathering his team, he said, "Everybody needs to think about what I have to do as an individual to be an elite player and what do I do to help my unit be elite in terms of doing my job and playing to a certain standard.

"That's what gets you there. It's not about talent. We have got that. We have enough of that. It's everybody having the idea of what we need to do, what do I need to do for myself, my unit and my team for us to be elite. That's what everybody needs to think about because I don't think we're there yet."

Minutes later, Saban worked his way up to the media room and stepped behind the microphone before delivering a message that dovetailed with the one he gave to a different audience, in a different setting, with a different tone of voice.

"I don't think we're an elite team right now," Saban told the journalists in his midst.

The reporters took down his words and then disseminated them across the Internet and in newsprint. The quote made for good copy and provided the hook for an article. But it also reinforced the crux of Saban's speech to his players. While Saban's news conferences provide good theater -- giving the combustible coach the platform to launch verbal assaults on anything that sparks his ire -- they also open another avenue for him to needle his players, to motivate them, to warn them and to inspire them. He'll pump up Alabama's opponents and downplay the hype surrounding his own team, calling it "rat poison."

"I think every single thing that man does is premeditated," said former center Bradley Bozeman. "That's what makes him so good. Everything he does he's thought out and he knows the situation going into it. And he knows exactly what he's going to say and when he's going to say it....Sometimes it goes back and forth. Sometimes he tells the media and then tells us. Sometimes he tells us and tells the media. I think he does a really good job of being consistent in that aspect of it. What he's telling us is what he means and what he's saying to the public."

See next page
Earlier this month, while standing behind that famous wooden pulpit with the Alabama insignia, Saban answered a question about Damien Harris' leadership and segued into a commentary about the absence of "Alpha Dog" personalities on a defense once populated with them. This was the subject Saban really wanted to address, so he made certain to steer the dialogue in that direction. Less than 24 hours after he did, Saban delivered the same message to the team.

It resonated with the players, according to defensive lineman Quinnen Williams.

"We don't want to have no fall off from last year to this year," he said.

That Saban has found a way to make his sessions with the media useful toward his purpose of advancing the program's mission is hardly surprising. After all, Saban is all about efficiency, psychology and strategic thinking. He scarfs down the same meals on a daily basis to reduce the time he would have to invest in deciding what to eat. During practices, he has the players run between drills, ensuring there is not a wasted moment.

Everything he does is carefully plotted, and there is a rationale behind each of his decisions. Before he steps in front of a phalanx of cameras and behind a microphone, Saban has an idea of what he's going to say.

"I always have a message to everybody in our organization, the fans and everybody in the organization," Saban said. "It's a philosophical thing I try to reiterate when I'm in a press conference. So it's not necessarily just a message to the team at all. It's just trying to give everyone feedback in terms of what's happening in the program and in some cases, what I think we need to do to improve."

Blake Sims realized as much when he played quarterback for the Crimson Tide four years ago.

Back then, Saban pulled him aside on multiple occasions to buzz his ear while the two were on the field during practice, inside the Mal Moore Athletic Facility or at Bryant-Denny Stadium before the game. The message was always the same, Sims recalled.

"Play into the team and play into the system, then I'll just be very successful," Sims remembered Saban telling him.

Then Sims heard Saban utter those same words in a news conference.

There was no escaping the message.

It was Saban's version of brainwashing.

"He's hitting it with me in person and basically again out there with the media," Bozeman said. "It's basically double-dropping it in."

Just like that afternoon almost a year ago, when he proclaimed twice in a span of 30 minutes that the Crimson Tide wasn't an elite team -- setting the stage for Alabama to defy him over the next 261 days until it claimed its 17th national championship.
Sankey talks conference concerns
SANEY

From Page B1

University might recruit. Rather than risk running afoul of the rule, UA has opted to not have any high school coaches participate in the camp as it had for many years. Saban, as you can imagine, was not a fan of the rule.

Sankey said Saban’s complaint was a common refrain from coaches across the league and that the topic was likely to be one of the discussion points at the league’s annual spring meetings in Destin in a couple of months.

Sankey also discussed the FBI probe into college basketball, an investigation that resulted in multiple suspensions in the SEC this season.

“I think there’s an appropriate level of concern and attention given what’s happened around men’s basketball,” Sankey said. “I did not mean and would not imply that I think it’s just business as usual. I’ve seen some observations that ‘Oh wow, we’re just back to business as usual. I don’t think that’s the case. I don’t get that sense from our programs and programs nationally. There’s a period on that sentence.

“We’re now waiting to see the outcome from the Rice commission and what expectations will exist moving forward either around our basketball programs, around enforcement and infractions activity — whatever it may be. There were four sets of issues — interactions with sneaker and apparel companies, interactions with NBA agents. I don’t think there’s a time when you can settle in and say, ‘OK, everything’s fine. We’re moving forward.’ I think the attention’s been raised and the attention will be raised again when that report is released. And then there will probably be a lot of new work in determining how we meet whatever new expectations may exist.”

Given the perception of college basketball, especially as it pertains to recruiting, Sankey was pressed about the topic. Wasn’t it obvious that this type of recruiting was occurring?

“There were concerns about basketball recruiting,” Sankey said. “I will not sit here and say, ‘Oh yeah, everybody knew.’ I’ve seen those type of comments and observations I don’t think everybody knew. I think what you’ve seen today is individuals who made decisions outside the scope of the values around our intercollegiate athletics programs. They made those decisions. You saw plenty of teams that don’t have those issues. ’

“In fact, 98-99 percent of our teams aren’t dealing with those types of issues now. But there is clearly a level of attention that’s been raised around men’s basketball recruiting. But we’ll see how we move forward.”

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