JUNE 1, 2018

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Hyundai investing $388M to update, build plants

The Associated Press

MONTGOMERY — Hyundai plans to invest more than $350 million to build a plant in Alabama and also update an existing one there, officials said Tuesday.

The automative manufacturer with headquarters in Seoul, South Korea, said it plans to invest $388 million to construct the 260,000-square-foot (24,000-square-meter) engine head manufacturing plant, as well as enhance its assembly plant in Montgomery, news outlets reported.

The investment is the company's biggest in the plant since it opened in 2005, and the new facility is scheduled to be operational by mid-2019.

The plant will create 50 new jobs with an average annual salary of

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HYUNDAI

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$52,000, Gov. Kay Ivey said. The company has already started fielding applications for the workers, who will begin in March.

Some new positions will be taken by current employees and their jobs will be filled with new workers, plant spokesman Robert Burns said. The company is investing in new manufacturing technologies at the plant, Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Alabama President and CEO Dong Ryoeol Choi said. The money will support operations for making new models of Sonata and Elantra sedans.

Hyundai announced in March that its redesigned Santa Fe SUV would be assembled entirely in Montgomery. Full production starts Friday.

Chris Susock, the plant's vice president of production operations, had said the company expects the new Santa Fe to reverse a trend that had the plant decrease its overall production. For several years, the plant made only Sonata and Elantra sedans.

The plant has nearly 3,000 full-time employees.
What to do as Alabama’s education system at crossroads

Alabama is approaching an education crossroads.
Many of the state officials in charge of education will begin new terms next year. Gov. Kay Ivey or her successor will begin a full term in office, and a record number of newcomers will be sworn into the House and Senate for the new quadrennium. The State Board of Education will have two members to replace Betty Peters and Mary Scott Hunter, who are not running for re-election.

With these elections on the horizon and Dr. Eric Mackey beginning his tenure as state superintendent, it’s time for Alabama to set new goals for education to ensure all students are college and career ready – to ensure they are ready for real life – by the time they graduate.

A new report from A+ Education Partnership and a coalition of its peers from across the South urges Alabama and the entire region to make a new commitment to improve K-12 education. A+ joined its counterparts in Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina and Tennessee to produce the report.

"Accelerating the Pace: The Future of Education in the American South" shows that while Alabama and the South have made major advances in education in recent decades, some "achievement gaps" between more affluent students and historically disadvantaged classmates have widened.

Alabama’s future depends on turning this around and building an education system that ensures every child can attain a high-quality education.

"If schools do not help more students catch up more quickly – even as they raise expectations for all children – the region’s economic prospects will worsen. In some areas, they already have. Now is the time for states to develop a long-term vision for improving education so that many more children can succeed in school and life," Accelerating the Pace says.

The report calls for state leaders to focus on four main priority areas for improvement. These ideas came largely from interviews with fellow Southerners.

Make the South the best place to teach.
We need even more teachers and principals in Alabama who have the talent, preparation and continued support to help students succeed.

Provide new types of academic — and nonacademic — support for today’s students.
Students need more support systems than we are providing for dealing with family and emotional health issues that can impact their learning. All children can learn at high levels, but we must meet them where they are in their personal journeys, not where we as adults want them to be.

Clear all students’ paths from high school into their next steps.
Some students don’t know what to do after high school. Alabama has begun remediating this by highlighting multiple pathways for students with its Six College and Career Ready Indicators. Let’s build a much stronger bridge from high school into college, career training or a good job by ensuring all students meet at least one of those indicators by the time they graduate.

Ensure resources are adequate and targeted.
Invest in education programs to meet the needs of every child, and find additional support for students who need the most help. It’ll pay off for all of us.

Education is one issue that’s too important to fall into today’s rancorous political divide. This is about our children’s lives, the health of our communities and the future of Alabama.

Let’s work together to make new, substantial progress in improving schools for every child, no matter their background or ZIP code.

Thomas Rains is vice president of policy and operations for the A+ Education Partnership.
Sales tax ruling could have big effect for Alabama

When we convened a panel of local mayors in March, the impact of e-commerce on sales tax revenue was a hot topic.

Several mayors decried what is often called the “Amazon effect” and how it has affected their local budgets.

While there are few signs pointing to a slowdown in digital commerce, a looming U.S. Supreme Court ruling could hold the key to Alabama and its local governments securing more sales tax revenue from online sales, as well as simplification of the state’s sales tax collection process.

The nation’s highest court is expected to rule by the end of June on South Dakota v. Wayfair Inc., a case that could open up the door for states and local governments around the nation to collect sales taxes from online retailers, even if the retailers don’t have a physical presence in the state.

Experts say the decision looms particularly large for Alabama, which has a high sales tax burden and a complicated system in which all cities and counties can levy and collect their own sales, use and rental taxes.

Bruce Ely, partner at Bradley Arant Boult Cummings LLP and adjunct professor at the University of Alabama, said Alabama’s system presents unique challenges on a number of fronts, including for businesses trying to navigate the complex tax landscape in the state.

“It creates all sorts of headaches that nobody else in the country has other than Colorado and Louisiana,” Ely said.

It also limits the amount of sales tax revenue coming into Alabama, as some retailers have chosen to only collect the state tax and not the local sales taxes.

If the Supreme Court rules for South Dakota, Ely said it could open the door for Alabama to adopt an identical statute in the next legislative session that would likely result in local municipalities and counties coming back under the umbrella for the Alabama Department of Revenue.

While some have pushed for that to happen in previous years, Ely said the Wayfair decision could create an incentive for the local governments to do so in the form of additional tax revenue.

“That’s the thing that will spur them on. All this tax money they aren’t getting now – millions of dollars – because the states and therefore localities can’t constitutionally require out-of-state vendors to collect their sales tax,” Ely said. “There’s a lot of money left on the table for the locals, even more so than the state. Alabama is the poster child for the need for local tax simplification.”

Alabama did recently establish the Simplified Sellers Use Tax Program that allows many retailers to collect a flat 8 percent state and local sales tax. Many companies, including Amazon, have joined that program. Legislation passed earlier in 2018 also will require third-party sellers on participating sites, like Amazon, to also collect sales taxes.

But many online retailers, both big and small, still remain outside of the SSUT program. And while the state technically asks residents to self-report and pay consumer use taxes on out-of-state purchases during tax-filing season, not many taxpayers actually do so.

Ely and others say the complexity caused by Alabama’s local tax “field of dreams” creates headaches for out-of-state vendors looking to do business in the state.

While he said a ruling for South Dakota could spark Alabama lawmakers to take action, Ely said the Supreme Court could “deflect” and instead put the onus on Congress to create a simplified national model for collecting sales taxes.

If Congress takes action and a national framework is established, he said the bill would likely have a high threshold for participation, meaning small retailers wouldn’t like to see their tax burdens rise due to the decision.

He also said there is the potential for Alabama to take action on its own, even if Congress doesn’t. Ely said a previous task force laid the groundwork for Alabama to capitalize on the Wayfair decision or other future changes, but cities and counties likely need a catalyst like the upcoming Supreme Court decision.

-Ty West
Tourism numbers rise in Tuscaloosa County, state

By Stephen Dethrage
Staff Writer

Visitors and tourists spent almost $600 million in Tuscaloosa County last year, according to a report compiled and released by the Alabama Tourism Department, which represents 9.7 percent growth over 2016 figures.

The report indicates that the local spikes reflect a statewide trend — across Alabama, the tourism industry grew by $1 billion as travelers spent a record-breaking $14.3 billion in 2017.

"Every part of the state saw dramatic growth, from the mountains of the Tennessee Valley to the beaches along the Gulf Coast," Gov. Kay Ivey said in a news release. "Most communities generated more revenue and gained jobs through meetings, conventions, sporting events, visits to museums and other tourist attractions. The larger counties which have invested in sporting venues have seen an increase in the number of youth teams arriving from outside the immediate area for tournaments."

According to the department's report, travel and tourism are directly and indirectly responsible for 7,770 jobs in Tuscaloosa County, which amounts to more than 4 percent of the area's total employment.

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TOURISTS

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Don Staley, the CEO of Tuscaloosa Tourism and Sports, said he was thrilled by the data from the state's report and the development it represents.

"All around, Alabama tourism has displayed incredible growth; including Tuscaloosa and my friends in Baldwin County," said Staley, who came to Tuscaloosa after a three-year stint as executive director of sports in the city of Foley. "Today's report exemplifies the economic impact tourism has on our state. The profits from hotel, restaurant, retail and entertainment spending affect us all."
Building a better robot

UA team makes strong showing in NASA contest

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

Fresh off another top place finish in a NASA robotics competition inspired by future Mars missions, the University of Alabama's Astrobotics team is already thinking about how to improve its robot for next year.

"I think the robot performed very well, exactly as we expected it," said Max Eastepp, a junior majoring in electrical and computer engineering and the team leader.

The UA team won first place in six of the nine awards and swept the technical categories at the NASA Robotic Mining Competition. The team competed in the contest at Kennedy Space Center in Florida from May 14-18.

UA teams have previously placed first in 2012, 2015, 2016 and 2017. Banners for previous years hang above the sandpit in Hardaway Hall, where the team tests its robots.

The motivation behind the annual contest is to build a robot capable of navigating a simulated Martian surface and excavating regolith, a layer of loose surface material that covers solid rock.

This year, the task was changed to reflect the discovery that water is on the planet. Robots had to mine the icy regolith, simulated with gravel, which could provide oxygen, water and fuel for future off-world colonists, according to the contest website. The robots had to mine the gravel from a course simulating the Martian surface and return and deposit their loads in a collection bin. The robots were allotted 10 minutes for each of their two attempts.

"The biggest technical challenge is if the system will hold up to the forces it is under," Eastepp said.

In the past, the robots were designed with the goal of harvesting the top layer of the regolith, said Kenny Ricks, an associate professor in the department of electrical and computer engineering and the team's faculty adviser. The new challenge of harvesting the ice from the regolith required the robots to dig much deeper than before.

"That really created some problems for all teams."

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ROBOT

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Ricks said.
The robot had to excavate a hole 14 inches deep to reach the gravel.

"In the initial testing, we broke all kinds of stuff," Eastep said.

In the past, robots had to scoop 10 kilograms of regolith, but this year, the team had to collect just 1 kilogram of gravel to qualify, Ricks said. UA's team collected around 6 kilograms in its two runs, Ricks said.

The UA team of about 65 students had to add extra safety features to accommodate the additional strain of digging deeper. The robot had a stall-prevention protocol that helped it avoid damaging itself if it encountered obstacles while digging, Ricks said.

The robot can't discern the top layer from the gravel layer but was programmed to know how deep to dig, Ricks said. The robot also gets feedback from its motors, allowing it to adjust operations based on the hardness of the material it encounters in its excavation.

"It knows how hard the material is and adjusts," Ricks said.

The robot became heavier than previous models with the reinforcement. The heavier robot required more power to operate, which affected battery life.

"None of these things are considered in a vacuum," Ricks said.

The team's robot went from about 42 kilograms last year to 55 kilograms for the recent competition, Ricks said.

UA's astrobotics robots continue to incorporate autonomous navigation. UA's team was the only one to have a robot that competed entirely autonomously. The robot uses cameras and LIDAR, a light detection and ranging sensor that uses a pulsed laser to measure ranges, to navigate terrain and obstacles and identify samples.

The team improved the obstacle detection method and pathfinding algorithm this year, Ricks said.

As the team looks to next year and a contest NASA has signaled will be changed significantly, Ricks said students are already considering how to improve the hardware and software.

This year, the robot encountered a large rock during one of its excavations that prevented it from digging as deep as the team would have liked.

"If we would have known, we would have (programmed a solution) this time," Ricks said.

Adaptability and autonomy will be important features for future NASA robots, Ricks said. The time delays between the red planet and earth make constant communication and monitoring difficult.

"NASA isn't interested in having a mining robot that needs that much oversight," he said. "They want these robots up on Mars years before the astronauts show up."

NASA's Curiosity rover uses stereo cameras for its autonomous information, Ricks said. The setup requires the rover to use a lot of computational power to process the information from the cameras to navigate. Ricks believes UA's LIDAR-based system is a viable alternative that uses less computer power to successfully maneuver in the Martian terrain.

"I think we are getting to the point where we are showing there is a viable alternative," he said.
UA offers free museum admission to military members

Staff report

Active-duty military members and their families can enter University of Alabama museums free of charge beginning Monday as part of the Blue Star Museums program.

The Blue Star Museums program is a partnership between the National Endowment for the Arts, Blue Star Families, the Department of Defense and more than 2,000 museums across America.

The program will begin its ninth year and will run from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

Active-duty military and their families will receive free admission to the Alabama Museum of Natural History, Moundville Archaeological Park and Gorgas House. Admission to the Warner Transportation Museum is regularly free, so Blue Star families can take guided tours for just $1 per person.

UA Museums are participating in the program for the first year.

"Most of us personally know Blue Star Families," said Bill Bomar, executive director of University of Alabama Museums. "One of my favorite Blue Star Families happens to be descended from former UA President Josiah Gorgas and his wife, Amelia, whose lives are commemorated at our Gorgas House Museum. "Four great-great-great-great-grandchildren—all under age 10—of Josiah and Amelia came and visited recently with their mom while evacuating from a hurricane," Bomar said. "I personally witnessed the challenges this mom faces with her four young children while their dad is deployed. The absolute least we can do for families like this is let them enjoy our museums free of charge. We are excited to participate in this wonderful program."

Admission to the Bryant Museum will be free of charge to both active-duty and retired veterans. Additionally, the Bryant Museum will honor each military member with a free copy of "All of Us Fought the War" and "When Winning Was Everything."

The Bryant Museum is participating in the Blue Star Museums program for the seventh year. In 2017, 746 community members took advantage of the Blue Star program at Bryant Museum.

"The Blue Star Museums program gives the Bryant Museum a chance to say 'thank you' to those who serve, and their families," said Ken Gaddy, director of the Bryant Museum. "One of our student employees is in the Army Reserves and has recently returned to school from active duty. Through her, we are reminded of the sacrifices, not only by those in uniform, but by their families. We are especially glad to be able to offer copies of the books as an added tribute to veterans and active military."

For more information about Blue Star Museums programs, visit https://www.arts.gov/national/blue-star-museums.
Johnson, Byrne eye upgrade to Coleman

Michael Casagrande mcasagrande@al.com

From the moment Avery Johnson arrived three years ago, Alabama basketball facility upgrades were a talking point.

Aging Coleman Coliseum is now 50 years old. It’s not up to the standard of the newer and/or the improved homes of basketball programs across the SEC. Alabama’s been quietly discussing its options moving forward in terms of improving its situation.

Athletic director Greg Byrne previously said they are looking at building a new arena or doing a major renovation of Coleman Coliseum.

"It’s leaning more towards the idea of a remodel but even there, we’re not there yet," Byrne said Wednesday at the SEC spring meetings in Destin. "We’ve been studying that and research in the marketplace about what would be supported and then we have to find a financial model that can work."

Byrne said there still wasn’t any kind of timetable set for when any changes would be designed, announced or implemented.

"I think it will be more of a renovation than a new building," Johnson said.

Ole Miss spent $96.5 million building The Pavilion, which opened in 2016 seating 9,500. Auburn Arena was built for $86 million in 2010 ($98 million when adjusted for inflation). It seats 9,121 for basketball.

Coleman Coliseum has 15,383 seats in an airplane hangar-sized building that lacks the intimacy of the newer arenas. Even Kentucky is reducing the size of Rupp Arena by about 2,500 seats to add chair-back options and club amenities.

Johnson said they are addressing student participation in the game-day environment. Ole Miss and Auburn’s arenas have students sitting courtside, almost right on top of the floor. Alabama moved students to the sideline two years ago, but the angle of Coleman’s seating bowl leaves them a significant distance from the action.

"Also, how can we have better and more high-level VIP experiences for our season ticket holders?" Johnson said.

"Because with me coming from the NBA world, the entertainment value of your games, being able to entertain at different levels, not just with the team on the court but all of those experiences that are sometimes exposed and sometimes hidden behind certain club levels and some that are not visible. I just think providing all of those experiences for different levels of ticket holders are critically important to our program."

Coleman Coliseum has no luxury suites. A club level was added in the mid 2000s behind the east basket, where donors can eat a buffet meal before games with a view of the court. That was the last significant update to the structure.

Johnson said this upgrade will be much more significant than a new paint job.

"How can we transform Coleman?" he said. "I think that’s where we are."
Sooner the better on Coleman decision

By: Cecil Hurt

DESTIN, Fla. | In the breezy, surf side elegance of the Florida hotel where the Southeastern Conference holds its annual meetings, the last building that one would think of on a sunlit afternoon would be Coleman Coliseum.

The Crimson Tide’s home arena for basketball and gymnastics wasn’t a league-wide topic but the topic did come up with both UA director of athletics Greg Byrne and men’s basketball coach Avery Johnson. Byrne was asked about the facility, though, and said that the discussions which have been ongoing almost since the day he took over at Alabama nearly 15 months ago are “trending to renovation,” although he was quick to add that no final plan has been approved yet.

The quick scorecard on the plus/minus scale regarding Coleman Coliseum are this.

The facility is 50 years old, venerable by the standards of Power Five conference arenas (although it is certainly not the oldest in the nation by any means). From its construction, it was designed more to be functional than an aesthetic and architectural wonder and it has done that, at an original cost of about $3.6 million dollars in 1967. That figure is from the December 1967 Tuscaloosa News article about the imminent opening of what was then called Memorial Coliseum. Even that first article referred to the building as “cavernous,” just as an aside.

On the other hand, site preparation and construction costs for a new arena on a different area of the UA campus (or even a demolition/rebuild that would render the sports teams that use Coleman homeless for at least a year) would be prodigious. Byrne didn’t mention any figures but such a project would run well into the hundreds of millions of dollars.

The other opinion that was sought, of course, was Avery Johnson, who also happened to be in Destin, who was his “preference” in what boils down to a debate between fixing it up and blowing it up.

“My preference is that we have to address our home facility,” Johnson said in a sort of a cross-over dribble of an answer, one where you thought you had a clear view of an opinion and then you didn’t.

“I’ve sat in on a lot of meetings about it,” Johnson said. “I won’t say it’s been two years, but it hasn’t just been two months. Greg has provided great leadership in that area.

“I think it will be more of a renovation than a new building,” Johnson said. “Without sending out the alarm, I think it’s more about how we can transform Coleman.”

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"Increasing our student participation has certainly been talked about," Johnson said. "Also, how can we (provide) a better, more high-level experience for our season ticket holders and not just the team on the court? Frankly, those experiences are critically important."

What Johnson said he does not want is a renovation that would just be "slapping another coat of paint" on Coleman Coliseum. That might include anything, ranging from reconfiguration of the seating (which would probably involve reduction of capacity, especially as skybox-type seating is part of any plan) to fixing the lights. While fans are divided about building a new Coliseum, everyone agrees that Coleman is currently lit like a 1930s horror movie, and not a high-class Universal Studios production either, but a Republic Studios B-shocker like "Valley of the Zombies." I don't know who does the lighting for the Golden Knights hockey team in Las Vegas, but, renovation or rebuild, Alabama should ask.

There probably won't be a final word on the project until the late summer or fall. As Coleman ages, the sooner, the better.
Atlanta accountant is one-man PR firm for former Bama athletes

With nearly 85,000 tweets and 16,000 followers since 2012, John Graham informs masses from behind his desk

Michael Casagrande mcasagrande@al.com

The online community of Alabama fandom is a rich tapestry wedged in the spectrum of rational to bizarre. It's launched loud-mouthed observers to a degree of fame only possible in today's culture.

Mostly, it's all in fun.

Then there's John Graham sitting at his desk in Atlanta. He's an accountant living a suburban lifestyle that allows him to blend in with the rest of a faceless sports web.

Spend any time on Twitter in this Crimson Tide ecosystem, however, and his online persona appears.

Graham is @BamaProUpdates, the one-stop resource for the mainstream to far edges of obscure news about former Alabama athletes competing anywhere on the globe.

If someone is playing a tennis qualifier in Egypt or a summer league in Asia and they attended Alabama, @BamaProUpdates has your back. No event is too small for a tweet.

Since launching the night of the 2012 NBA draft, @BamaProUpdates has tweeted nearly 85,000 times.

That's an average of 39.4 updates every single day in the 2,146 days since the account was launched the night Ja'Michael Green and Tony Mitchell hoped to hear their names called. By the time Collin Sexton hears his name called as the first NBA draft pick from Alabama in a decade, @BamaProUpdates will have more than 15,700 followers.

Graham, 54, never expected more than 300-400 people to follow him but his account has become a powerhouse among see twitter, B3

The performance was eventually picked up by news outlets including AL.com and Yahoo Sports.

For the most part, Graham did this without much personal fanfare. His profile picture is Alabama's script-A on a white background. He added his name to the bio on the profile page a few years ago.

I just decided, a little anonymity is fine but if you're going to post something, somebody needs to know who is behind it. It's not like I'm firing shots at anyone or anything like that. I think it's important that we have some level of accountability so I did add my name at least.

The account is meticulous and consistent. Myers remembers @BamaProUpdates apologizing in advance for a lack of posts because he was attending a wedding.

"He's amazing," Myers said. "Hell, he's a CPA. I don't see how he has time to work with all of this following a soccer player who played at Alabama who is in Lithuania."

As long as they're playing, Tide alums will end up on a @BamaProUpdates spreadsheet and a Twitter feed near you. Compensation comes in the form of direct messages from some of the athletes the account follows, Graham said.

He's genuinely touched by the appreciation from athletes who aren't too big to show their gratitude.

And the occasional unmasking from Myers at a baseball game draws a sheepish smile from the accountant from Atlanta.

"Yeah, I guess there are worse things to be known for," @BamaProUpdates said.
Showtime at Gulf Shores

Jackson, played by Daniel Fobes, center, Prudie, played by Allie Stewart, left, and Rhetta, played by Miranda Therkelsen, rehearse the show Pump Boys and Dinettes at Galloway Theatre on the University of Alabama campus on Thursday. The show opens in Gulf Shores on Sunday and the cast will perform a total of 25 shows through June 26 before coming back to Tuscaloosa. [STAFF PHOTO/ERIN NELSON]

SummerTide a beachside tradition

By Mark Hughes Cobb
Staff Writer

As beach towns go, Gulf Shores plays it cool, even in summer's heat. Oh there are tacky T-shirt shacks, over-amped cars cruising, and on sunny days, bronzed bodies covered only by coconut oil and the barest strips of fabric. Visitors can ride go-carts, splash through a water park, or visit the zoo, or wildlife refuges. Miles west, guests can walk the ruins of Fort Morgan, built in the aftermath of the War of 1812. The more adventurous can parasail or go deep-sea fishing, ride waverunners or emulate skydiving.

Restaurants dot the area, from your standard chains to more home-grown spots like the open-air Lulu's, created by the sister of Jimmy Buffett — they grew up around

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TRADITION

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these parts — and dive bars like the gaudy Pink Pony Pub. Goofy golf, hiking trails, wildlife. ... It's not
really all that wild, Gulf Shores, not overly popu-
lated, little in the way of shady nightlife. No one's
going to write a coked-up crime drama called "Gulf
Shores Vice."

It's a family destination, generally, built up and
around private residences, many dating back to days
when tourists generally rolled down to Panama
City Beach, or Pensacola. Even with the just-past
Hangout Festival, and its annual fall shrimp festival,
Gulf Shores remains that stretch of sugar-white
sands where you can see familiar faces, year after
year.

SummerTide's made itself at home in Gulf
Shores' George C. Meyer Performing Arts Theatre
for 15 years now, and beach residents and visitors alike
have come to anticipate the University of Alabama
Department of Theatre and Dance's five-week
professional run.

"There are definitely a lot of repeats," said
Miranda Therkelsen, who's about to start her third
summer there. "It's a really small theater, but
word has spread through-out the community. So if
people come once, they tend to come every year."

For its 15th summer, UA chose to return to the
show it began with back in 2004, the little homies
musical that could, "Pump Boys and Dinettes." The
musical-comedy's es-
entially a friendship come to
life, as the writer-creators
built it about their own
experiences, working day
jobs, playing and sing-
ing together at nights.
Originally a two-person
show, it evolved into an
off-Broadway and event-
ually Tony-nominated
Broadway run with four
gas-pump jockeys — Jim
Jackson, L.M. and Eddie —
flirting and dancing with
neighbors at the Double
Cup Diner, sisters Rhetta
and Prudie Cupp. They're
situated in the deep South,
where Frog Level and Smyrna, Geor-
gia, along Highway 57.

In that first year, Stacy Alley choreo-
graphed and co-starred
as Rhetta. For year 15, she's directing, and
choreographing again, while letting Therkelsen take
over as big sis Rhetta.
UA students and recent
grads fill the cast: Jim
(Dylan Davis), Prudie
(Allie Stewart), Jack-
son (Daniel Fobes), L.M.
(Nicholas Coker) and
Eddie (Matt Kelley). While
the kids still sing, play
pots-and-pans percussion
and dance, there weren't
enough instrument-pro-
ficient students to play
the show as usually done — the Pump Boys usually
handle all instrumentation — so they're backed by
musical director Terry
Moore on piano, Josh
Green on guitar, Ben Hol-
comb on bass, and Tristan
Dierman on drums. They
hired a bit of a ringer in
Green, who's just finished
a run of the show for Bir-
mingham's Terrific New
Theatre. While everyone
was encouraged to come
in to first rehearsals ready
to roll, off book and know-
ing the music, Green had
head-s-ups, and got there
first.

"I couldn't pretend like
I was that talented," he
said, laughing.

After a few years teach-
ing at Arkansas State, Alley
returned to UA as faculty.
This will be her ninth year
at the beach, and Moore's
sixth. Stage and company
manager Mary Fran Crook,
another UA grad, returns
for her fourth Summer-
Tide. So it's in many ways
a reunion.

"There are (visitors)
who remember specific
things, ask about spe-
cific people from earlier
shows," Alley said. "It's
like a little happy family."

And it's one of the hotter
attractions in the laid-back
beach town.

"There's not a lot to do
in Gulf Shores after you
eat," she said, "you've
been in the sun all day...
so these short shows,
they're not rocket science.
They're fun."

The premise of "Pump
Boys and Dinettes" is
simply that the audience
is sitting in, or very near,
as the friends — and occa-
sional sweethearts — get
together and jam at the
end of a long working
day. There's not a plot,
really, but some jokes
and short tales bridged
by a set of old-school
rock 'n' roll and country,
twangy rockabilly and bal-
lads, with whimsical pop
such as "Farmer Tan," "Drinkin' Shoes" and "The
Night Dolly Parton Was Almost Mine," a driving
"Highway 57," the slinky mildly suggestive "Tips,"
and tear-jerkers like "Mamaw" and "Sister."

It's not far from some-
thing Buffett might have
written, though they're all
original songs by the first
cast, written back in the
early '80s.

Because there's not
much happening, beyond
picking and grinning, the
toughest work for the kids
has been developing rela-
tionships: Who do these
folks mean to each other?
How do the boys relate?
What are their hearts
yearning toward?

"It's about your friends
that are your family,"
Alley said.

Even though the boys
aren't handling guitars,
"The whole show is just
like a big rock concert,"
Kelley said. "It's different
than most; I think it's a fun
twist on what's normally
done."

"It's a great gig,"
Therkelsen said. "You get
to work at the beach. Your
audience pretty much
always loves you, which
isn't something that usu-
ally happens in theater.

"Then, at night, you get
to do theater."

"Pump Boys and
Dinettes" runs Tuesdays-
Sundays, beginning this
coming Friday, June 1, and
continuing through June
29, at the George C. Meyer
Performing Arts Center,
2022 West Second St., Gulf
Shores. Tickets are $20
general, $15 for children
12 and up. Group rates of
$15 each are available for
parties of 10 or more. Some
early June shows are sold
out; call 251-968-6721 or
see www.summertide.org
for more.
Author Rick Bragg and ‘The Best Cook in the World’

Bob Carlton bcarlton@al.com

By his own admission, Rick Bragg couldn't bake a decent biscuit if you held a shotgun to his head and made him do it.
Frying chicken is lost on him, too.
So is fixing cornbread.
But his mother, Margaret Bragg, now, that woman can cook.
Butter rolls. Pecan pie. Sweet potato cobbler.
And, oh, those pinto beans with ham bone.
"Pinto beans and ham, that's like our Holy Grail," Bragg says. "We had it over the weekend. Mom just whipped it together one afternoon."
The Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and author of the bestsellers "All Over but the Shoutin" and "Ava's Man" shares many of his 81-year-old mother's favorite dishes, and the colorful stories behind them, in his new memoir-cookbook, "The Best Cook in the World: Tales from My Momma's Table," which came out April 24.
Margaret Bragg, who raised three boys through some very hard times in rural Calhoun County, has never used a cookbook, a fancy mixer or even a measuring cup, her son says.
She has, by Rick's count, gone through 13 stoves, however.
Instead, she cooks from memory and instinct, from recipes not written down but passed down and shared by her ancestors, most of whom, like her, learned to cook just to keep their family from going hungry.
"She just knows," her son says in his office at the University of Alabama, where he teaches courses in literary journalism and magazine writing. "And that's where the premise (originated): If you don't have a written-down recipe, where does it come from? Well, it comes from the stories themselves."

EVERY DISH TELLS A STORY
Each of the 75 or so recipes in "The Best Cook in the World" — which covers everything from hamburger steak with brown gravy to baked possum and sweet potatoes — is associated with a memorable life event in his family's history.
"Food was on the fringes — and sometimes at the heart — of every story we told," Bragg says. "I mean, if you told a story about a baptism, then the food that day, you would remember. If you told a story about dinner on the grounds, you knew what was served at dinner on the grounds."
Many of the recipes trace their roots back a century or more to Bragg's great-grandfather James J. "Jimmy Jim" Bundrum, who may or may not have killed a man in a drunken knife fight and fled to the North Georgia mountains to avoid prison.

Jimmy Jim's kitchen skills, Bragg writes, were "his saving grace," though, and a few years after he skipped town, his son Charlie, so hungry "his bones threatened to eat right through his clothes," tracked him down and begged him to come back to Alabama to teach Charlie's culinarily challenged bride, Ava, how to cook.
"My favorite chapter to write is him teaching her how to kill a chicken, and her taking to it, not slowly, but just like that," Bragg says, snapping his fingers. "That speaks to the little bit of darkness inside her."
"I've seen her do that I don't know how many times as a kid," he adds. "And it thrilled me because that meant fried chicken. She cooked me fried chicken every Saturday of my life — Saturday, not Sunday — from the time I was 4 years old until I was probably 10 or 11."

A 'DASH,' A 'SMIDGEN' AND A 'HANDFUL'
The biggest challenge for Bragg was trying to translate his mother's old-fashioned colloquialisms — a "handful" of this, a "dab" or "smidgen" of that — into terms and measurements that modern cooks might understand.
"The one that infuriated me was 'some,' he says. "I said, 'Well, how much do you use?' She said, 'You know, hon, just some.' What the heck is 'some'?
"And this was my favorite: 'How long do you cook it?' 'Well, I don't know. I've never timed it. You cook it 'til it's done.' And I say, 'Well, how do you know when it's done?' She says, 'By how it smells.'"

Some of the recipes come with vague, almost hopeful, instructions — such as, "If it's golden brown on top, it's likely okay," or "Bake about 15 to 20 minutes, depending on the mysteries of your oven."
"There are a lot of qualifiers in there, like 'everybody's oven is different,'" Bragg says. "That's our way of saying, 'Take your best shot.'"

While the recipes and the stories surrounding them have been cherished and guarded like family heirlooms, Bragg says he felt the urgency to get them in writing while there's still someone around who remembers them.
"We've lost a lot of our kin folks over the years," he says.
"Uncle James, who figures prominently into this most recent book, died this year. I went and gave a real short eulogy at his funeral."

See next page
BRAGG
FROM C1

"He was such a talker. He's one of those people who's given me stacks and stacks and stacks of stories over the years. He can tell you a tall tale and have you transfixed, and he can tell you a true tale and have you transfixed. And sometimes, you have to ask your momma which one was true."

BACK HOME IN CALHOUN COUNTY

Bragg, who has a house in Fairhope and commutes to Tuscaloosa to teach one day a week when school is in session, is spending more time back home with his mother in Calhoun County these days.

"I'm there a big part of the time," he says, "I don't see the place down in Fairhope very much. I went down and spent a week or two when things were real good in the house in Calhoun County."

Over the past five years, Margaret Bragg has survived heart failure and fought colon cancer, but she is a tough one to keep down, her son says.

"At 80 years old, she bore up to a solid year of chemotherapy," he says. "It all took a toll on her, but she was out yesterday with my brother Sam, putting topsoil in buckets to grow her — we call it a 'pot garden,' which is a terrible choice of words. In these pots, she grows cherry tomatoes and hot peppers."

The 88-year-old Bragg has dealt with some serious health issues of his own, but other than being "old and grouchy," as he puts it, he is counting his blessings.

"I haven't talked much about it because that becomes the narrative in your life," he says. "I've just been so lucky compared to so many people. I had Non-Hodgkin lymphoma, so I was treatable. ... I've done three books since the diagnosis, so I'm very fortunate.

"And to be honest, when somebody like your mom has such a much more serious disease, there hasn't been much time to think about it."

With the passage of time, comes reflection, and a kinder appreciation for the good things in his life.

For those reasons, "The Best Cook in the World" means just as much to him to any of the previous books he has written about his family — from "All Over but the Shoutin'" to "Ava's Man" to "The Prince of Frogtown."

"I loved writing 'Ava's Man' more than any book I've ever written," he says. "'Shoutin' was hard, but it was more important than any book. But I enjoyed writing this one because it was gentler, and I've got older and probably appreciate it more."
Rick Bragg to be presented with award

Honor recognizes his support of other writers

Staff report

Pulitzer Prize-winning writer and teacher Rick Bragg will receive the 2018 Joanne Sloan Award for the Encouragement of Writing on June 8 during the Southern Christian Writers Conference. Though not officially connected with the conference, the Sloan Award, recognizing an individual who has supported writers for many years, has been given annually during the workshop.

The award ceremony and dinner will begin at 6 p.m. June 8 at First Baptist Church, 721 Greensboro Ave. in Tuscaloosa. Tickets are $25 and available by emailing vision.pressbooks@gmail.com.

Bragg won the Pulitzer in 1996 for his reporting at The New York Times.

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Bragg

From Page A6

Lee Lewis, Bragg teaches writing at the University of Alabama and speaks at numerous conferences and workshops.

Bragg's won more than 50 writing awards, including the American Society of Newspaper Editors' Distinguished Writing Award twice, Southern Book Prize, Harper Lee Award and Clarence Cason Award for nonfiction writing.

and with his 1999 book about being brought up by a self-sacrificing mother, "All Over But the Shoutin'," he began a string of nonfiction bestsellers.

In addition to writing books, including more memoirs and biographies of Jessica Lynch and Jerry
Study: Bham vulnerable to cyberthreats

Rarely a day goes by when cybersecurity isn’t in the news. Multiple major companies—and many cities—have been the subject of recent data breaches, with costs stretching far into the millions of dollars.

Despite the headlines, many companies across the nation remain underprepared for cyberthreats, and a new study ranks metro Birmingham among the most vulnerable cities in the nation.

Coronet, a provider of enterprise-grade cloud security, said Birmingham ranked sixth among the nation's most unsecured metro areas for cybercrime. Las Vegas, Memphis and Charlotte ranked as the most insecure and vulnerable.

The report pointed to Birmingham’s large manufacturing sector that is increasingly reliant on automation as a reason why the area could be an attractive target.

The report also found an elevated probability local users are connecting to medium- or high-risk networks, and that 10 percent of devices in the area have no password protection, a stat that is worse than the national average.

Gary Warner, director of research in computer science at UAB and a widely recognized expert in cybersecurity, said there are vulnerabilities locally, particularly among small and midsize businesses.

“I think it’s true that Birmingham does have some issues with cybersecurity,” Warner said. “The larger corporations have entire staffs in charge of security, and they are able to implement practices the rest of Birmingham (can’t). If you ask someone in a 12-man company, it’s not someone’s full-time job, whereas somewhere larger, it’s someone’s responsibility.”

Warner said larger companies in the area have made cybersecurity a priority—something that requires a significant investment.

But even outside of company grounds, Warner said there are a number of threats that could affect a business.

He said business travelers add to the risk when they connect company devices to public or hotel Wi-Fi networks—a decision that could put sensitive company information at risk of being accessed.

Warner said allowing work devices to be used by family members and children also creates opportunities for threats to emerge.

Jennifer Skjellum, the former president of TechBirmingham and current director of blockchain and crypto innovation at ThreatAdvice, spoke May 22 to the Kiwanis Club of Birmingham on the growing number of cybersecurity threats.

She noted how cybercriminals are becoming more sophisticated with their attacks and harder to detect.

During her speech, Skjellum noted several cyberthreats that have affected Birmingham companies and entities, illustrating that any business or organization could be a target.

While many cybersecurity efforts focus on companies and servers, Skjellum noted that cellphones are also a key area of risk, with cellphone phishing and phone spoofing posing threats.

One often-overlooked aspect of cybersecurity is third-party vendors.

Skjellum said some major data breaches have occurred due to third-party vendors being hacked and allowing cybercriminals to access another company’s network and sensitive information.

For all those reasons, she said it's critical for companies to be prepared and continue focusing on cybersecurity, since hackers are constantly evolving and updating their tactics.

““All businesses, regardless of size or sector, need to be vigilant about cybersecurity,” Skjellum said. “This includes preparedness, education, awareness, analysis and detection. The number of small to mid-size companies operating in Birmingham likely influenced the outcome based on the methodology listed, but it does not reflect actual practices. Every city has public Wi-Fi for example which needs to be used cautiously if at all.”

Warner said there are several factors to consider when improving cybersecurity.

“There are a lot of things you can do to stop your average hacker. If you don’t want someone to scan your machines that is easier than if you’re trying to stop the Chinese government from getting into your system, since there is not much you can do,” he said.

The basics, according to Warner, are making sure that you have a patch management plan, knowing how often you refresh your machines and ensuring you know who is managing your machines are some of the initial steps to take.
FOLLOW-UP FILE

HOW UAB'S NEW COMMERCIALIZATION ACCELERATOR PERFORMED IN ITS FIRST YEAR

The new commercialization accelerator UAB launched last August has helped establish and launch two startup companies and is currently in the process of developing five others. The UAB Commercialization Accelerator provided entrepreneurial training to 29 students in the spring semester.

"Research, innovation and economic development is one of the four mission pillars of UAB's Strategic Plan," said Kathy Nugent, executive director of the Harbert Institute of Innovation and Entrepreneurship. "Our goal is to create an ecosystem across the campus and in the community where being innovative and entrepreneurial is a mindset."

Two startup companies, Fledging LLC and Vector Applications LLC, were formed as a result of the program. An additional two startups, Ceres and Sniper Digital Marketing, are planning to incorporate in the near future.

"The Student Accelerator Program cultivates the entrepreneurial spirit on campus, enabling student founders to turn their ideas into profit-earning companies," said Weida Tan, founder of Fledging. "Such endeavors have been longed for by students for years. The vision of this program will impact the entire student body and the startup community for years to come."

Fledging, which presented their company at the Velocity Accelerator's Demo Day, produces solid state drives for Apple computers. They currently sell their product on eBay, with more than 700 customers in 37 countries worldwide. Vector Applications is a web development agency specializing in dynamic web applications. So far, the startup has served corporate enterprises and universities. The company signed $15,000 worth of contracts at the accelerator and has 11 clients.
The Magic City's new team

When Birmingham's new professional soccer team was hiring its first president, the team found someone with a unique blend of soccer accomplishments and business acumen.

The big hire was Jay Heaps, the former New England Revolution coach now tasked with launching the Birmingham Legion FC – the Magic City's new United Soccer League franchise.

While Heaps brings a wealth of experience from his time in MLS, the top echelon of professional soccer in the U.S., he also spent time at Morgan Stanley.

That business experience will come in handy as Heaps and the rest of the USL team negotiates deals and lays out a pathway to success for Birmingham's first foray into the professional soccer world.

While the team has worked out several key details, securing an agreement to play at an expanded BBVA Compass Field on the UAB campus, finalizing an apparel deal with Nike and lining up Post Consumer Brands as the team's first sponsor, much work remains before the team takes the field in 2019.

The BBJ sat down with Heaps to see what is in store for the future of soccer in Birmingham.

What is the biggest career risk you've taken? Probably leaving a very successful career at Morgan Stanley to become the head coach of New England. For me, it wasn't a decision. It chose me. The opportunity came, and I dove in – all in on it – and once I was offered the...

JAY HEAPS

Career Track: Played in MLS for Miami Fusion, New England Revolution and U.S. National Team. Employed at Morgan Stanley in its MBA training program. Later served as head coach at NE Revolution for seven years.

Education: Duke University

Family: Wife Danielle; three kids, Jack, 13, Olivia, 11, Jude, 7

Who wins the world cup? I think Germany has a really good case, but if Neymar comes back healthy, Brazil has a strong chance.

See next page
opportunity and the chance to interview and to have the job, it wasn’t a choice. It captured me, and I went for it.

If you could tell your 22-year-old self anything, what would it be? Live in the moment. I think when you are a 22-year-old kid, you’re always trying to think “what’s next?” or “what’s my next career opportunity?” Sometimes, that takes care of itself. Don’t worry about what’s 10 years away and be present.

What is your favorite thing about Birmingham? I’m new to the area, but there’s been such - for me - a feeling of people just going out of their way to help. Whether it’s my kids moving to new schools and the parents of their friends helping us make the transition, to people in Birmingham wanting Birmingham to be successful. Maybe they are not soccer fans, but they’re thrilled we’re bringing something to Birmingham, and that Birmingham will have a professional soccer team in one of the highest leagues in the U.S., and that they will be able to be a part of it. People love that we’re doing this to make Birmingham a better place to come and see different events.

Now with a place to play settled, what is the next step for the Legion? The (Premier Development League) season. That marketing campaign where not only are we trying to develop players but also (giving) a nod to what the Birmingham Hammerheads have been able to do (over the past five years) - that transition from the Hammerheads into the Legion (and making sure the Hammerheads are presented the right way) - is a critical phase. We are also hiring out our front office, and it’s important that we are represented by people from Birmingham, people who know the area. They know what this city is all about. Then, also to have soccer-specific-minded people to build a club that has the real essence, the real authenticity of professional soccer. So (we are) building out that component. All the while, because I am president and general manager, I am interviewing head coaches. We are far down in that process, and now we have narrowed it down, and the next phase is getting a head coach and signing our first player this summer and building the roster as the fall comes around.

What effect do you think soccer will have in a football-heavy environment? I look at it like this. I don’t think we are ever going to try to directly compete with college football, because it’s a part of the culture here. I think we want to enhance that and offer professional soccer in a light where you can do both, where you’re saying, “Wow, this is something I want to see live.” And maybe you don’t make it out to every college football game - you watch it on TV - and maybe that evening you go and you see a live-action soccer game. We are certainly going to do things that are in conjunction with college football in the sense where we don’t want to have any direct conflicts. We’re going to be mindful of that, because we want our fans to enjoy it all. I think there is a certain balance, but we want people from this area - from Birmingham - to realize that, while we’re soccer and we are high-level professional soccer, we also think watching our games live is a really exciting venue to be a part of.

What are some words that you live by or run your company by? Culture is the most critical piece. You have to have a really smart and efficient strategy, but culture is ultimately what makes the strategy come to life. And, for me, culture is working in an environment where you want to be there. That you love coming to work and you love being a part of what you’re doing. I think for us, that is an area where as we build our front office, as we build our team, we want people to want to play for the name on the front of the jersey not the back and when you start with that mentality in the front office, you want it to carry over to the players on the field - that they are playing for Birmingham, and they’re here for the right reasons.

Reporter Tyler Patchen conducted this interview. You can reach him at tpatchen@bizjournals.com.
UAH offers $1M in engineering scholarships to disadvantaged students

By: Lee Roop

One of Alabama's top engineering universities - the University of Alabama in Huntsville - has $1 million in new scholarships for financially disadvantaged transfer students.

Students in the program will be working on engineering research in subjects such as ion thrusters, 3D printed materials and UAV butterflies. UAH graduate and current PhD student Destin Sandlin, whose science website Smarter Every Day has 5.5 million subscribers, explained some of the research possibilities in a new YouTube video for the university.

The scholarship program is called MATRIX (Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering Assistance for Transfer Improvement and Excellence), and UAH announced it today. It is funded by the National Science Foundation.

"Those selected for MATRIX will receive scholarships about $10,000 per year for up to two consecutive years beginning with their first fall semester at UAH," assistant professor and program manager Dr. Kavan Hazeli said in a statement.

"Their first year in the program will focus on community building and undergraduate research, and their second year will focus on professional development, networking, and internships," Hazeli said. "They will also have the possibility of staying in the program for a third year based on their performance."

UAH's engineering program promotes its roles in aerospace research at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center and military research at contractors working for the Army centers based Redstone Arsenal.

"Another major benefit of this program is the professional development, networking, and internship opportunities available to our MATRIX students, thanks in large part to our long-standing partnership with engineering companies here in the Tennessee Valley," Hazeli said. "The internships in particular will provide these aspiring engineers with valuable hands-on experience, which will give them a competitive edge when they enter the professional workforce after graduation."
Researchers develop novel technique to identify counterfeit flash memory

By: Diana Lachance

Counterfeiting electronic components may sound like a plot point lifted from a technothriller by Daniel Suarez or Michael Crichton, but it's a very real – and growing – threat to the safety and reliability of our critical infrastructure.

"Nowadays we use consumer electronics for a year or so, but the components in them remain 'alive' for up to 10 years," says Dr. Biswajit Ray, an assistant professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH). "As a result, there's an incentive to bring them back to market by harvesting them from scrapped printed circuit boards and re-using them in spite of the adverse effects that these counterfeit components can have because of their limited endurance."

The problem has been further exacerbated in recent years as the semiconductor supply chain has shifted from a vertical to a horizontal model. "Because of manufacturers' enhanced reliance on independent suppliers," says Dr. Ray, "these electronic systems are at a lot more risk of counterfeiting and piracy than ever." And as counterfeiters get more and more savvy, it can be harder and harder to tell whether the components in any given electronic system are fresh or recycled – that is, he says, "until they stop working and the consumer blames the manufacturer for making a faulty product!"

At particularly high risk of counterfeiting is flash memory, a nonvolatile digital storage medium that stores data on a chip. "Flash is a major target because of its presence in the most electronic systems – it's used for everything from space applications to consumer electronics," says Dr. Ray. "But detection of recycled flash with high confidence is challenging due to the variability among different flash chips." Few feasible solutions have been proposed, however, and those that have rely on the maintenance of an extensive database or on manufacturers' willingness to adopt sensor-based approaches.

Until now, that is. Together with his colleague Dr. M. Tauhidur Rahman and graduate students Preeti Kumari, M.S. Bahar Talukder, and Sadman Sakib, Dr. Ray has developed a novel method of detecting counterfeit flash memory based on a combination of the statistical distribution of various timing characteristics of memory and the number of faulty bits.

"Most researchers focus on fail bit count or how fast the chip can read and write – they never worry about program-erase time," explains Talukder of the team's approach. "But while fail bit count and read and write time do show changes, program-erase time is the best metric because it shows the most amount of variation." It's also more consistent across manufacturers and tends to increase noticeably even after just a few program-erase cycles. "We found that we were getting a 100 percent confidence level – a decision metric that measures whether we can detect a recycled memory accurately – for a flash with just 3 percent usage," says Sakib. Just as important for any future consumers, the technique is "inexpensive, non-destructive, and requires no additional hardware," says Kumari, who is now looking into testing it against temperature and voltage variations.

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The team has already filed several patent applications to protect their detection method, which they hope to one day turn into both a smartphone application and a browser extension. But far from hoping to profit personally from the endeavor, they’re more interested in helping safeguard the electronic systems used by our nation’s most vital infrastructure sectors. "Failure of flash memory in critical applications can have catastrophic effects, from simply corrupting the system to enabling a hardware Trojan attack," says Dr. Rahman. "So there is a big demand for this ability to detect counterfeit flash with high confidence."
From bullied student to No. 1 in class: Elliott is West Morgan’s first black male valedictorian

By: Deangelo McDaniel

For almost a month, Austin Elliott has been working on the speech he will give during West Morgan High School’s graduation Tuesday.

His appearance will be historic — he will become the first black male valedictorian in school history — and Elliott wants his message to encourage his classmates, but also “be real” about his high school experience.

“I was bullied by a few, very few, of my classmates, and most of it was racial bullying,” he said.

In a 2014 report, the U.S. Department of Education released a joint study with the Centers for Disease Control which revealed one in three students said they had been bullied. The most common types of bullying were verbal and social, and the majority of it occurred in middle school.

Elliott’s was mostly verbal, and it happened in middle and high school. He used the experience as motivation, often turning to academics as an outlet to prove his worth.

Lucas Johnston has been Elliott’s friend and classmate since third grade, and the two will attend the University of Alabama in Huntsville. He was aware that Elliott was bullied in middle school “because he was so much smarter than everyone else,” but Johnston said they didn’t discuss it in high school.

“He never came to school upset and took his education seriously,” Johnston said. “He’s always been a very good friend.”

Elliott said he learned in middle school that retaliating against bullies made him like them. So he decided to chart a course of inclusion and academic success.

He said he wasn’t an athlete, but was determined to represent West Morgan “in the best light I could.”

Elliott turned to academics and said he focused on what Principal Keith Harris challenged them to do when they enrolled as freshmen.

“We ask our students to leave the school better than they find it,” the principal said. “Austin has certainly done his part and more.”

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Harris and counselor Natasha Burks were the first to inform Elliott that he was going to be valedictorian. They pulled him out of class in February because they wanted to share the news with his classmates.

“It’s generally never good when the principal comes to get you out of class, and I thought I was in trouble,” Elliott said.

He knew he was ranked No. 1 in his class when the school year started, but wasn’t sure about being valedictorian. Elliott said Harris informed him during their meeting that he was the school’s first black male valedictorian.

Dr. Wonder Puryear Drake, who graduated with Harris in 1986, was the school’s first black valedictorian. She is a physician scientist and associate professor of medicine at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine.

“Some big shoes to fill,” Elliott joked.

Classmate Shelby McCulloch has no doubt that Elliott is up to any challenge. “He’s really smart, but puts others before himself,” she said.

Elliott, who plans to study accounting at UAH, said he doesn’t remember a time when academics were not first in his life. He has been a straight-A student since first grade and is graduating with a 4.5 grade-point average.

His most difficult time in school was when he was bullied because he struggled to understand why the color of his skin mattered. Elliott said it was “just certain individuals” who called him the n-word and that the overwhelming majority of the students at West Morgan are kind and loving.

He said his struggles with bullying made him more determined academically. Elliott said he didn’t share what he was going through with a lot of people, but leaned on his spirituality, parents and friends who saw him for who he is.

Angel Elliott, one of two older sisters, was aware of the bullying and at one point said the family talked about transferring him from West Morgan. “But he wanted to stay and fight through it,” she said. “He wanted to show them who would come out on top in the end.”

Elliott, 17 and a National Honor Society member, said he wants to become a certified public accountant. He hopes his graduation speech mirrors what he helped the Student Council do when West Morgan held its first class Olympics this year. The three-day event included academic and athletic competitions, which meant every student could participate. “We are one school, one student body and one community, regardless of skin color or anything else,” Elliott said. “I’ve had some good experiences at West Morgan, and I hope people hear this in my speech.”
Auburn board to vote on starting project, architect for suite renovations at Jordan-Hare Stadium

By: James Crepea

Auburn is planning to renovate some of the suites at Jordan-Hare Stadium following the upcoming football season.

The university's property and facilities committee will present a proposal to initiate the two-phase project and select an architect to Auburn's board of trustees during its meeting on June 8.

The project, which does not have a listed budget, is expected to enhance the gameday experience for suite holders in the "third and fourth level East suites" of Jordan-Hare Stadium, according to documents.

"The first phase of the project will provide new operable windows and fans to allow better access to the sounds and general atmosphere of the game and ... the second phase of the project will provide routine renovations, to include upgrades to the finishes and standard HVAC system improvement," according to proposal documents.

The first phase would begin after the upcoming football season with the goal of being completed prior to the 2019 football season, which Auburn opens against Oregon in Arlington, Texas before coming home to face Tulane on Sept. 7, 2019.

Stacy Norman Architects of Auburn is the proposed firm to be selected as the project architect due to its experience with similar suite renovation projects at Jordan-Hare Stadium in 2017.

Though there is not a listed cost for the project in proposal documents, it is expected to be financed by "a combination of gift and athletics department funds."
Tiffany Coppel has been hired to the Alabama women’s basketball staff as assistant coach and recruiting coordinator, coach Kristy Curry announced on Tuesday.

Coppel joins the Crimson Tide after spending the last two seasons in the same position at Northwestern University.

Prior to her tenure with the Wildcats, Coppel spent three seasons at Northern Iowa as assistant coach.

Tide has 10 earn All-SEC honors

Ten Alabama track and field student-athletes earned All-SEC honors for their performances at the SEC Outdoor championships, the league office announced Tuesday. Four Tide athletes were named to the Freshman All-SEC team.

Three of the Crimson Tide’s all-conference recipients were double honorees — junior Vincent Kiprop (first team — men’s 5,000 meters and 10,000 meters), senior Alfred Chekenga (second team — men’s 5,000 meters and 10,000 meters) and freshman Tamara Clark (second team — women’s 100 meters and 200 meters).

Junior Shelby McEwen also earned first-team All-SEC for her victory in the men’s high jump. Other second-team recipients for the men are junior Kord Ferguson (discus), junior Daniel Haugh (hammer throw), junior Gilbert Kigen (10,000 meters) and junior Keitavious Walter (200 meters).

Joining Clark as a second-team women’s selection are junior Por- tious Warren (shot put) and freshman McKenzie Yanek (10,000 meters).

Alabama’s Freshman All-SEC honorees include Clark (women’s 100 meters), Yanek (women’s 10,000 meters), Jamie Robinson (women’s triple jump) and Christian Edwards (men’s triple jump).

Stephenson a finalist for Honda Award

Alabama’s Lauren Stephenson is one of four nominees for the 2018 Honda Sport Award for Golf, the Collegiate Women’s Sports Awards (CWSA) announced Tuesday.

Stephenson is joined as a finalist by Wake Forest’s Jennifer Kupcho, Stanford’s Andrea Lee and UCLA’s Lilia Vu.

The Honda Sport Award has been presented annually by the CWSA for the past 42 years to the top female athletes in 12 NCAA-sanctioned sports. The winners of each of the sport awards become finalists for the Collegiate Woman Athlete of the Year and the 2018 Honda Cup, which will be presented on June 25 in Los Angeles.
Saban: Denial of transfer is not ‘on me’

Alabama coach blames SEC rules for Brandon Kennedy, Maurice Smith controversies

Michael Casagrande mcasagrande@al.com

The ongoing saga of Brandon Kennedy’s potential transfer from Alabama has reached Destin.

As decision-makers gather on the Gulf Coast for the annual SEC Spring Meetings, Nick Saban weighed in. Kennedy, a reserve offensive lineman, is hoping to transfer to another SEC school. There is, of course, a rule that prevents that unless the original school signs off on it.

Like the Maurice Smith transfer two years ago to Georgia, Alabama is not allowing the exemption. Asked specifically about Kennedy’s application to go within the SEC being denied, Saban launched into the most impassioned response of his interview.

“The then on should change the rule,” Saban said. “I don’t think it should be on me. I think we should change the rule. If we agree at the SEC at these meetings that we’re going to have free agency in our league and everyone can go wherever they want to go when they graduate, that’s what’s best for the game, then that’s what we should do.

“Then Brandon Kennedy can go wherever he wants to go. But if we don’t do that, why is it on me? Because we have a conference rule that says he can’t be on the other school? It’s not even my decision. It’s a conference rule. I always give people releases. And he has a release to go wherever he wants to go, but the conference rule says he can’t go in conference. So, why is that on me?”

Before moving on, Saban added one final thought.

“The Maurice Smith thing wasn’t on me either,” Saban said.

The SEC eventually allowed the transfer of Smith to Georgia, where he played his final season in 2016. Kennedy’s latest appeal to Alabama was denied last week.

SEE SABAN, B3

Alabama coach Nick Saban addressed conference transfer rules at SEC Spring Meetings in Destin, Florida.

Associated Press file

The Birmingham News

Wednesday, May 30, 2018
SABAN
FROM B1

Saban said the issue is bigger than just transferring players. He appealed to a bigger concern he sees this concept impacting.

He often refers to the rule changes resulting in “free agency” within the game. If a player can transfer whenever he wants, how can they discipline players, Saban asked?

“I think that’s something we should address as a league,” Saban said. “And to be honest with you, if we allow that to happen in our league, I think it will benefit some schools more than others. And I think we’re one of the schools it would benefit. But I’m still not for it.”

Saban also commented on last week’s commitment for a fourth scholarship quarterback that joined the Alabama program. Layne Hatcher, a three-star originally headed to Arkansas State, swapped for Alabama and said he’d be arriving over Memorial Day weekend.

The Tide was looking at a couple different quarterback potentials, Saban said. Hatcher will join Jalen Hurts, Tua Tagovailoa and Mac Jones as Alabama scholarship passers.

“We were excited to be able to ... he has been in a very winning program,” Saban said. “He’s a very bright guy. He’s a good athlete. I thought he was a really good decision-maker. Actually, very accurate with the ball. We were kind of excited to get somebody of his caliber to be able to come in and contribute at that position because of our numbers situation there.”

Hatcher comes to Alabama from Little Rock’s Pulaski Academy. Known for its unorthodox style that includes kicking onside every time and never punting, the Bruins have won four straight state championships.

Michael Casagrande is an Alabama beat writer for the Alabama Media Group.
Follow him on Twitter @ ByCasagrande or on Facebook.
More big games could be on the way for Tide

By Cecil Hurt
Sports Editor

DESTIN, Fla. — University of Alabama director of athletics Greg Byrne has added two marquee nonconference football series to the Alabama football schedule in the coming decade — and he may not be finished.

"We still have a period between (2024 and 2027) where we're talking about some different scenarios," Byrne said at the SEC Meetings on Wednesday. "I'm sure neutral games will be part of those years. Will they be all four? I don't know yet. Depends on how some conversations go."

Neutral-site games have been a fixture on the Alabama schedule since Nick Saban became head coach at UA in 2007 and have been successful for Alabama, both in on-the-field results — since losing to Florida State in Jacksonville, Alabama has reeled off eight consecutive wins in neutral-site season openers.

"They've been very good to us, no question," Sankey said. He did not specify any particular schools that Alabama may have joined in scheduling discussions, although he did indicate one factor in the Texas and Notre Dame discussions was "football tradition."

"One of the things that people often forget about when they have the scheduling discussion is (that) there's an assumption that both teams want to play each other, and there's also an assumption that dates can work. Those two things create challenges in that process.

"But I think it is important for all of us as ADs and our coaches — and Coach Saban and I have very much been in lockstep on it — is finding games that our fan bases are going to be excited to be a part of, that our teams are going to be excited to be a part of. And that's worked for us."

In agreement

Auburn coach Gus Malzahn doesn't always see eye-to-eye with Alabama's Nick Saban but the two football coaches are in harmony on one issue: headsets.

A recent NCAA directive will limit teams to having just 20 individuals on headsets during football games this fall, although many SEC coaches feel the rule was a sideways swipe at staff sizes that does not address the issue straight on.

The usually mild-mannered Malzahn stopped short of Saban's characterization of the new rule as "mouse manure when you're up to your ears in elephant doo-doo," but he was fairly animated on the issue.

See SEC, C2
"The 20-headset rule is a joke," Malzahn said following the football coaches' session at the SEC. "There's no doubt about it. I think that's got the ability to hurt our game. That's a really big deal and it came about just to try to affect the staff sizes.

"Any rule that's put in place because of something else is not good." Malzahn would hurt younger coaches who listen as much for education as participation.

"That's something we're going to have to deal with," he said. "The quality of the game, coaching, that's what I'm concerned about. The fact that you can only have 10 assistants or your four have headsets on and then you're going to put four of your current players on a headset? I don't know. I mean, that's going to affect the game. And that's disappointing."

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com
OSU plays lights out, beats Alabama for NCAA title

By Cameron Jourdan
Special to The Tuscaloosa News

STILLWATER, Okla. – Anytime Alabama did something special, Oklahoma State found a way to do something incredible.

Whether it was a shot through trees that lipped out for eagle or a chip-in eagle from a bunker, the Cowboys dominated on their home course, defeating Alabama 5-0 in the NCAA national championship match Wednesday at Karsten Creek Golf Club.

“We played pretty good golf,” Alabama coach Jay Seawell said. “They just played great golf. So we tip our cap to them. I’m really proud of how our guys handled themselves all week.”

Alabama’s day started poorly, and it couldn’t recover. No matter how close the Crimson Tide hit a shot or how spectacular a putt it made, OSU had something better. The Cowboys’ victory was their 10th this season, and winning the national championship capped one of the best seasons in college golf history.

No Alabama golfer played poorly. At one point, freshman Wilson Furr was 2-up on OSU senior Kristoffer Ventura and the fourth and fifth matchup were at all square.

See COWBOYS, C4

Alabama’s Wilson Furr reacts after missing a putt on the second hole during the final round of the NCAA men’s golf championships in Stillwater, Okla. Alabama lost 5-0. (THE ASSOCIATED PRESS)
COWBOYS

From Page C1

Furr’s match went unfinished, though he was 3-down through 14 holes. As he was approaching the green, the gallery surrounding the 15th green erupted in cheers.

Junior Davis Riley had lost his match against OSU freshman Matthew Wolff, but even Riley said he didn’t play that poorly.

“There was kind of not too much I could have done differently, maybe a silly mistake here or there,” Riley said. “But it’s pretty hard to beat somebody who’s playing like that, out here especially, and they’re so comfortable with this track, and they just fed off the crowd.

“It was like a football game out there, it felt like with all the people.”

Riley dropped his match 4-and-3, and it went downhill quickly. With the fans behind him, Wolff drained an eagle putt on the first hole and was able to continue adding on birdies throughout the day. Even when Wolff hit it into the trees, he chipped and lipped out for eagle, and Riley eventually lost the hole.

Senior Jonathan Hardee was the last player out for Alabama, but his match was the first one finished. OSU junior Zach Bauchou dominated, winning his match 8-and-7, never stepping past the 11th hole.

Furr and fellow freshman Davis Shore were the two Alabama golfers whose matches went unfinished. Shore was 1-down through 14.

The last time OSU and Alabama met in the championship match in 2014, Alabama came away victorious. Wednesday, OSU stole the show.

“But no, they were just…they played really well,” Hardee said. “They played great all week, in the stroke play, and then going to match play and play as well as they did, they just have a lot of confidence around this track and a lot of positive energy from the fans out here.”

Hardee and Hodges finished their final collegiate tournament as runners-up, but Shore, Furr and Riley provide a bright future for one of the most consistent college golf programs in the country.

Seawell credited OSU’s stellar play throughout the afternoon, but he was happy with the bright future his players had in front of them.

“I think it was great for college golf because this is what I do,” Seawell said. “These guys one day are going to play on the PGA Tour, and I think they got a good taste of the Ryder Cup. The Tour is not going to be like this, but the Ryder Cup will be like that, that’s for sure.”
Alabama’s home opener against Arkansas State on Sept. 8 will be at 2:30 p.m. kick off and air on ESPN2.

The third game of the season, a meeting with Ole Miss in Oxford, will begin at 6 p.m. and air on ESPN.

It was previously announced that Alabama’s kickoff for the season opener against Louisville in Orlando, on Sept. 1 would be at 7 p.m. CT on ABC. The remainder of Alabama’s 2018 kickoff times will be announced during the season.

The announcements were part of a two-day roll-out of the confirmed games to be telecast by the SEC’s broadcast partners, CBS and the ESPN/ABC/SEC Networks.

The league also confirmed that the annual Egg Bowl between Ole Miss and Mississippi State will again be played on Thanksgiving night on ESPN.

See KICKOFF, C3
UA player's dad recovering from stroke

David Booker was returning from Tide's super regional softball series

By Lindsay Vaught
The Madison Record

MADISON - David Booker was always there for his daughters. First Sydney at Bob Jones High School and then Shelby at James Clemens High.

Sydney signed with Alabama and that meant trips to Tuscaloosa, especially for SEC softball weekend series and postseason games. Last week, Booker and family friend Paul Hughes flew on a 2,500-mile trip to Seattle for Alabama's super regional at the University of Washington.

Alabama lost two games and ended its season. But it was what happened coming back that has been on the minds of Alabama players and everyone in Madison who knows David Booker.

"My dad had a stroke on the plane and there was a doctor on the plane and the doctor told the pilot to land as soon as possible. They were over New Mexico and the pilot landed at Albuquerque," Booker's oldest daughter, Savanah, said Thursday from the hospital room at Presbyterian Hospital in Albuquerque.

See STROKE, C3

Alabama infielder Sydney Booker (6) fields the ball as she turns to throw to first base against Texas A&M at Rhoads Stadium on Saturday, May 5. Booker's dad suffered a stroke during a return flight from the Crimson Tide's super regional series in Seattle. He is recovering in a hospital in New Mexico. [STAFF PHOTO/ERIN NELSON]
He was able to regain movement on the left side of his body. He was still slurring speech the next day. Wednesday, he had got so much better that he walked a little bit. He still has numbness on his face. The doctors anticipate he will make a full recovery which is amazing considering he had a high score for damage from a stroke.

Hughes also got off the plane with him at Albuquerque and has stayed with him. Booker, a former Alabama football player, could be discharged June 1 but is still in ICU as a precaution.

Savannah Booker is a 2012 graduate of Bob Jones and then graduated from UAH. She is a registered nurse at Huntsville Hospital. She works in progressive surgery post trauma where patients go after car wrecks or gunshot wounds. Shelby is also studying to be a nurse.

Sydney will graduate from Alabama in August. She is majoring in finance. She had to be in class the day after this happened. She was conflicted, but David told her to go on with the class she needed to graduate.

“It was unexpected for sure. He will have to be on medication like for high blood pressure and blood thinner. He was trying to control his high blood pressure through diet and exercise but he will need the extra help now. We will be watching him closely. This was a big scare for us out of the blue. It was hard considering he was so far away,” Savannah said.

Booker’s niece Jessica Leah Johnson set up a gofundme account on behalf of the Booker kids. The website is https://www.gofundme.com/booker-family-medical

As of Thursday afternoon more than $10,000 had been collected.
SEC coaches: NCAA's new kickoff rule is a game-changer

Starting this fall, teams can fair catch kick inside 25-yard line for touchback

Michael Casagrande mcasagrande@al.com

The topics at the SEC Spring Meetings — if we’re being totally honest — can get a little stale. Largely, they deal with back-office issues that don’t have quantifiable impact on the average fan watching football on a given Saturday afternoon.

It’s mostly politics. Who can transfer where. Who can drink what and where it can be drank.

The whole kickoff situation is a little different.

Though it was decided elsewhere by the NCAA and will take effect this fall regardless, a number of SEC coaches had feedback on what they say will have a very visible impact on the product consumed so passionately around the region.

Starting this fall, teams can fair catch any kick inside the 25-yard line for a touchback. Previously, that had to occur in the end zone to get the ball at the 25. The idea is to cut down on the violent impacts that come with kickoffs.

“I’ve looked at the new rule and I’m sort of taken aback a bit,” said Vanderbilt coach Derek Mason. "I think it really changes our game. You have to figure out, we’re changing so much of the game, how much of it do you really want to impact. That’s a play in the game that’s extremely exciting.”

If trends continue for Alabama, the rule change will impact things significantly. Crimson Tide opponents had the second-worst starting field position nationally, according to cfbanalytics.com. With Alabama’s 99 kickoffs ranking seventh most in the country, the kicks from JK Scott that landed just outside the end zone had a big effect on where opponent possessions began.

Nick Saban, who didn’t address the change this week in Destin, previously said the goal on every kickoff was a touchback. The Tide was 53rd with a touchback percentage of 45.5.

Back in April, Saban said he wasn’t a big fan of the new rule.

"I thought it would be an easier solution to just move it back up to the 40-yard line," Saban said in the days immediately following the rule’s passage, "because you would get more touchbacks, but you could still sky kick, still onside kick, which you can still do some of those things."

"But you sky kick trying to give somebody bad field position. They fair catch the ball on the 15-yard line and get the ball on the 25. That takes some of the strategy out of the game, to me, with the result that you have." So, how will this change the way the game is played?

"I think you’ll see a whole lot of people fair catching and getting the ball at the 25-yard line," Auburn coach Gus Malzahn said. "I think if you average the 25-yard line last year I think you’d be the top 20 as far as field position. I think you’ll see a lot of people doing that."
KICKOFF
FROM B1

The national leader in 2017, Georgia Southern, had touchbacks on 85.2 percent of kickoffs. Florida had the highest touchback rate in the SEC at 78 percent.

"We're not going to change anything there," said South Carolina's Will Muschamp. "That's not going to change our approach. We'd like to kick the ball out of end zone and not worry about a return at all."

New Mississippi State coach Joe Moorhead is still in the planning phase.

"I think the strategy part of it is going to be relative to who your kicker is and who your return man is and what your schemes are. I think the chance to fair catch inside the 25 and get it started like a touchback is probably going to eliminate some of those big collision on the kickoff and also give you a chance to start the ball on a reason spot on the field."

Of course, teams aren't required to fair catch kicks that land inside the 20.

"If it's a pooch kick and you feel like you have somebody who can take it to the house and you get a hat on a hat, all it takes is a crease," said Vanderbilt's Mason. "Nowadays, those plays can be explosive. But what do I expect? I expect more fair catches."

Mason said he'd want to see a poll of college football fans to see how they feel about the new rule "because they're the ones who are going to come out and support us."

This whole new rule really got to Mason.

"Do we really want to change the game that much because now, what you've done, OK, instead of being able to pin somebody, defense is now having to start 10 yards farther back?" Mason said. "Every 10 yards, the possibility of scoring goes up. I know it's an offensive game, but we still have to protect some of the things in this game that make it exciting. And defensive stops make it exciting."
Tide adds quarterback for fall roster

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

Alabama made a late addition to its 2018 football recruiting class on Friday. Pulaski Academy (Arkansas) quarterback Layne Hatcher announced he committed to the Crimson Tide on Twitter.

"I cannot wait to be at Alabama and be part of the great winning tradition!!" he posted on Twitter at his account, @laynehatcher.

Hatcher had been committed to Arkansas State. He's ranked as a three-star quarterback and the No. 53 dual-threat quarterback in the country in the 247Sports Composite.

Hatcher told the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette he reports to campus on Saturday. Alabama's first summer session begins next week.

Pulaski Academy has received notoriety for head coach Kevin Kelley's innovative strategies. The Bruins rarely punt and often use onside kicks. They have won four straight 5A state titles in Arkansas.

Hatcher gives Alabama four quarterbacks on its roster along with junior Jalen Hurts, sophomore Tua Tagovailoa and red-shirt freshman Mac Jones.

Alabama did not originally sign a quarterback in the 2018 class.

"I think that we'll probably have a quarterback join us, some kind of way between now and then, which I don't think I can comment about," coach Nick Saban said on signing day. "Look, when you have really good young players at a position, sometimes it's hard to attract another guy at that particular position. I think you all know our circumstance at quarterback right now with the players we have here, the grade they are in and how much more eligibility they have. So rather reach for somebody, we would rather try to solve the issue another way. Maybe get a more experienced guy down the road, and certainly think that next year we might be in a position to get a really good player at that position who could be someone who could impact us in the future."

Alabama did receive a commitment from graduate transfer quarterback Gardner Minshew later in February, but he flipped his commitment to Washington State in March.

Alabama also has a pair of quarterback commitments for its 2019 class in Taulia Tagovailoa and Paul Tyson.

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EDITORIAL

NCAA should reconsider policy on legal drug use

Marijuana is easy to find on any college campus. College kids have been smoking pot at a pretty steady clip for decades, and that includes a substantial percentage of student-athletes.

Every year, it seems, college football players are in the news after being arrested for a small amount of pot. There’s no telling how many of these student-athletes are caught and not arrested due to an officer’s discretion. But when they are caught, no one is shocked. To many, marijuana possession is less serious than, say, public drunkeness or driving under the influence. It has happened more than a few times at the University of Alabama and resulted in no more than a slap on the player’s wrist.

People still have fun with the events of late September 2016, when UA police officers followed their noses to a parking lot on the Strip and discovered starting linebacker Tim Williams and a friend in a car where marijuana was also located. The driver told the police the pot wasn’t his, that he was just holding it for a friend — a friend named "Brandon Chicken." Williams, who was in the passenger seat, wasn’t charged with possession. The entire situation led to a lot of laughs and not much more.

The NCAA knows that the system in place to catch drug use among student-athletes is flawed. Reportedly, players at some universities have failed multiple tests for marijuana and missed no playing time. Frankly, we don’t think that’s a big deal.

That’s why what has unfolded at Auburn University recently has shined such a bright light on the hypocrisy of our approach to drug laws and, in particular, the NCAA’s rules.

C.J. Harris of Warner Robins, Ga., had long dreamed of playing football for Auburn. Harris had his first seizure when he was 14 and was soon diagnosed with epilepsy. He repeatedly had seizures that doctors couldn’t stop. Finally, a doctor prescribed cannabis oil in January 2017 and Harris hasn’t had a seizure since. In fact, the legal medicine worked so well it enabled Harris to have an outstanding senior year on the football field, and it appeared his dream was coming true — he was invited to join the Auburn football team as a preferred walk-on. Harris was up front with the university about his medical condition and the medicine he took to control his seizures. But his family said Auburn rescinded the offer, citing NCAA rules against marijuana use.

Now, keep in mind, the oil Harris takes has less than 0.3 percent of the psychoactive substance commonly called THC. He’s not getting high like one would while smoking a joint. He’s taking medicine that the state of Alabama legalized in 2016.

Auburn, according to a subsequent report, said the offer was withdrawn out of concern for his safety, not the cannabis oil. But that doesn’t change the NCAA’s position that Harris would be ineligible anyway, because its rules do not make an exception for the necessary use of a legal medicine. This is an absurd stance, and the NCAA should change it.