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Amazon breaks ground on $325 million fulfillment center

Howard Koplowitz  hkoplowitz@aol.com

The first shovels of dirt were turned Tuesday at the former U.S. Steel site in Bessemer. And in July, after using 82,000 cubic yards of concrete and 10,000 tons of steel, Amazon’s first fulfillment center in Alabama will be open for business on Powder Plant Road.

“It’s official: We’re expanding in Alabama,” said Ryan Lively, operations manager for Amazon, during the groundbreaking ceremony.


The ceremony was held the same day the Seattle-based company announced it will pay its most entry-level employees a $15-an-hour minimum wage. Amazon originally planned a $14.65 minimum wage for its eventual Bessemer employees: all of the Bessemer workers will receive “comprehensive benefits that start on day one,” Lively said.

“We’ve always offered competitive wages, but today we listened to our associates, and quite frankly, we want to be a leader in the industry, so it was really important to make that decision and put our best foot forward,” Lively said.

That $15 minimum wage will be earned by employees who will pack and ship small items, including books, toys, health care products and electronic devices, at the Bessemer facility. Other positions available will include human resources, information technology and operations management jobs. Lively said those jobs will be posted to amazon.org/fulfillmentjobs.com. Jobs around May, adding the tech giant will publicly announce the job openings about two months before the fulfillment center opens.

Ivey declined to say whether she believed other companies should follow Amazon’s lead in increasing their minimum wage for their Alabama employees, simply saying, “I was proud of this announcement today.”

The $325 million fulfillment center, comprising 855,000 square feet on 133 acres on Powder Plant Road, will support 1,500 jobs. Those numbers don’t include jobs from the 2,200 contractors doing work at the site. The site was owned by U.S. Steel until June, when the company sold the property to Amazon.

Millions of dollars in tax incentives helped lure Amazon to build in Bessemer; the company said it was interested in building a site somewhere in the Southeast due to rising demand.

Amazon will receive $3.3 million in incentives from Bessemer and $41.7 million in tax breaks from the state over 10 years. The company also agreed to earmark $10,000 toward STEM programs at Bessemer City High School — Lively presented the school with a giant ceremonial check during the groundbreaking ceremony.

“What Amazon has done is what so many of us already know in the city of Bessemer: that the city of Bessemer is a wonderful place to live and do business,” Gulley said. “When we talk about 1,500 new jobs in our city and we talk about an 855,000-square-foot facility, it’s just an awesome day for the city of Bessemer.”

The fulfillment center will lead to increased speed of deliveries for Amazon’s customers in the Southeast, according to Lively. He did not say whether the facility will make one-hour delivery or Amazon Prime Now, the company’s same-day delivery service, possible.

The project is Amazon’s second in the state. It opened a $30 million sorting center in Mobile last year.

“\When we talk about 1,500 new jobs in our city and we talk about an 855,000-square-foot facility, it’s just an awesome day for the city of Bessemer.\”

Bessemer Mayor Kenneth Gulley
Alabama inventor creates 'power for the people'

By: Deborah Storey

After five days without power in North Alabama following the 2011 tornadoes, one man was inspired to invent what could be a revolutionary green power source that captures wind.

Robert Yost was sitting on his deck in Huntsville with his wife during the outage. She looked at a fan spinning in the breeze and asked why you couldn't power a house that way.

Yost — whose 40 years of aerodynamics and manufacturing experience at GE, Boeing and Pratt & Whitney included designing jet engines — wondered, too. He began studying wind turbines and invented a small "cube" that converts wind power to electricity. His Huntsville company, American Wind, is now manufacturing units for customers that include the U.S. government and distributors in Japan, Mexico and South Korea.

American Wind's MicroCube, which measures 9-by-9-by-13 inches and weighs about 9 pounds, is designed more like a jet engine than a traditional wind turbine.

"He knew to optimally design a wind turbine, if you made the thing bigger and bigger you are getting more energy but you are increasing how much energy you lose," explained his son, Daniel Yost, company vice president of marketing. A bigger car takes more energy to move, for example. "He knew he had to make it small."

The first prototype was too small. The device 3-D printed at Huntsville's Inergi Inc. was 4 inches wide and too tiny to work on. Tools wouldn't fit in it, Yost explained, so they made it bigger — but not much.

Design specifics are secret, of course, but basically MicroCube's generator captures 98 percent of wind energy vs. roughly 35 percent for a traditional generator. The units are quieter, too. The 3-D printed cube includes neodymium magnets, just under 4,000 feet of wire, 11 blades and special ducting in a portable unit marketed as safe for the environment and wildlife.

"In 100 years no one has developed a generator like ours," Yost said. "It gives it a very unique ability and it's virtually frictionless. We actually have a statement from the patent office that calls it the first change in alternator design since (inventor Nikola) Tesla."

The blades, framing and control boxes are made from a proprietary resin as strong as steel but remarkably light. AT2LAS, a patented non-corroding material manufactured by Advanced Aerospace Tooling of Huntsville, weighs 40 percent less than aluminum and 80 percent less than steel. Lighter is better for the MicroCube because the idea is to install them in groups on rooftops, trailers, power poles or cell phone towers, or as wind-capturing walls.

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Robert Grigsby is owner of Advance Aerospace Tooling and Advanced American Technologies of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and Huntsville.

He predicts American Wind's wind-driven electric generator "will very likely be recognized as producing the greatest innovation to electrical power generation in the last century.

"Given that the MicroCube is no larger than your average toaster and generates a nominal 1 kilowatt of electricity that can be stored on-board, American Wind brings the promise of renewable energy to all corners of the world," Grigsby said.

American Wind's multi-blade cubes work together. The number required depends on power needs. A TriCube is three connected cubes. Fifty MicroCubes combine in a WindWall that "will create a vast amount of power," Yost said. The 10-foot-tall Advanced WindWall uses 100 MicroCubes to produce 100 kilowatts at maximum power.

"We take a single cube, put it into a wall of cubes, even at low wind speeds we can still produced a significant amount of power," said inventor Robert Yost. "The power of many, as we like to call it, comes into effect."

"Traditional wind turbines rely on sweep area. It's all about how big it is," said Daniel Yost.

The MicroCube generates power from breezes as subtle as 1.5 miles per hour — "not a lot, but there's some," said Yost. "When we get up to 35 or 40 miles per hour we start to get near our peak of 1 kilowatt. We call that our optimal range." Big wind turbines work in the 15-40 mph range.

MicroCubes are designed for wind up to 140 mph — at least. The company tested the product to 140 in two wind tunnels and it didn't fail. A California test next year will subject it to 300 mph winds. Because of the frictionless design, high wind isn't expected to cause the unit to overheat and explode.

"When Hurricane Florence came through there wasn't a wind speed our turbines couldn't handle," said Yost.

"We need to know what the failure point is. We know in most everyday scenarios there's not a failure point, even in category 3 hurricanes. But what about a category 5 tornado? What's it going to do? We're going to test it for those winds. We don't anticipate it failing."

Huntsville residents will be seeing WindWalls in use in the next few weeks. The first installation in the city will harness power from six Advanced WindWalls to power a section of a business. Yost can't disclose where yet but "you will see it when you drive every day."

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"Our product is so different a lot of people don't believe in it until they see it. People don't believe that it works until we take it to them and show them," he said.

"We can produce a lot more power in a smaller space. It comes back to the original story. Robert designed this for himself. It's meant to use right at the point of use. Our motto is 'Power to the People.' We mean it very literally."

For businesses on coastlines, for example, "instead of having to have a nuclear power plant 200 miles inland, where you have 200 miles of transmission loss, why not use those gale-force winds and put the power right there."

Because a MicroCube starts working with just a light breeze it can be used in parts of the world where winds are variable — like Alabama. The Southeast "has the worst wind speeds in the country," Yost said, and low cloud cover that can affect the efficiency of solar power.

"Seventy percent of the United States sits right here in these wind speeds," he explained. "If you can't serve these wind speeds what's the point of putting them out? We can service the entire range of wind speeds from 1.5 to over, we say, 65."

**Complete redesign**

The small wind-capturing turbine is not a new concept. There's even a wind cube on the market. Most designs just change the blades.

"They don't realize the generator is what's broke," said Yost. "It was the marrying them that's what's different.

"It's the combination of all the different things that we did that creates that difference in our product," he said. The alternator and wind turbine design are patented. "It's not a single thing we did. It's multiple things we did."

Robert Yost tilts traditional windmill power thinking on its head by changing not only size and materials but blade arrangement.

"The way Robert developed these blades, they're affecting each other in a positive relationship," Daniel Yost said. "One blade is capturing the air on the front side, and on the back side it's reducing its pressure so we can put more blades in a smaller space."

The company's marketing priority right now is commercial use. Residential sales will come later. Homes would need a smart controller, plus battery storage similar to solar systems. One microcube costs $2,850 and has an expected 30-year life span. Greater production volume should bring prices down, they say. The inventor plans to install them at his own house next year.

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An average home would need about 16 MicroCubes depending on the area. "My vision for this product is power for people that don't have it," said company president Robert Yost. "There are so many places here in the United States and around the globe that they can't afford to have electricity. You've got to produce it for cheaper. You've got to stay out of environmental hazards. There's not a single piece of material in our product that's environmentally hazardous."

American Wind held a military exercise this summer where the Tricube charged a large battery bank. The oil industry is looking at the technology for offshore rigs. Another design called the Portable Energy Power Source, or PEPS, has been engineered to provide power anywhere in the world for military or post-disaster use. The 120-inch tall grid of cubes on a trailer rises 30 feet to capture wind. In parts of the world with "dirty power" — high and low spikes — the PEPS should even it out so it won't harm equipment.

But what happens when the wind doesn't blow? "Nothing," said Daniel Yost. "A zero wind we don't see too often" in Alabama, but wind speed fluctuations are accounted for. Power can be stored in batteries or placed back into the grid and sold to the utility company.

American Wind's 12 employees are building product for large orders coming in, said Yost. The minimum investment for individuals is $25,000.

MicroCubes aren't capturing Alabama breezes yet at the company offices on Blake Bottom Road because the priority is to sell them. Robert Yost said it won't be long, though, before the little white boxes power American Wind's whole operation.

"About 18 months from now this facility will be totally off the grid," he predicted.
Mercedes decided 25 years ago to build in Alabama, fueling economy

By: Drew Taylor

Twenty-five years ago, Tuscaloosa County and Alabama faced an economic crossroads.

In 1993, some of the Tuscaloosa area’s biggest industries were Peco Foods, which deals with poultry, and JVC America, which dealt mainly with electronics. Across the state, apparel and textiles were seen as the leading industries. However, having a robust automotive manufacturing industry in Alabama seemed out of reach.

On Sept. 30, 1993, that all changed when Mercedes-Benz announced it would build a plant in Alabama with the state’s help, nearly $250 million in incentives. The announcement meant that the Tuscaloosa County town of Vance would become the site for Mercedes’ first passenger vehicle assembly plant outside of Germany.

Through the years, Mercedes-Benz U.S. International has contributed nearly $6 billion in investment across Tuscaloosa County. Economic leaders believe, however, that the Vance plant has meant much more for Alabama, becoming a catalyst to attract a burgeoning automotive industry that would not likely be here if not for the German carmaker’s commitment to the state.

“This was one of the most consequential news stories in Alabama history,” said Jo Bonner, now interim executive director of the Tuscaloosa County Industrial Development Authority.

Bonner, who was a U.S. congressman in Washington, D.C., in 1993, said there had been efforts in the past to bring a sizable automotive presence to the state, but none ever materialized until Mercedes.

“You look back in life and seeing that they didn’t get them, it was the best thing that ever happened to us,” he said.

Steve Sewell, executive vice president of the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, said that leading up to the Mercedes announcement, there was a need to find new revenue since textile jobs were either shutting down or moving overseas. Since 1993, around 82,000 textile jobs across Alabama have been lost, according to a recent report by “The World” on Public Radio International.

“It was a combination of what it meant practically to the economy and what you can measure in terms of the automotive industry,” Sewell said. “It gave them a foothold at a time when the state was losing tens of thousands of jobs in the textile industry.”

Making a pitch to Mercedes

In 1993, a team of economic leaders and professionals, code named Project Rosewood, was formed with the task of bringing Mercedes to Alabama. Despite competing with 49 other states for the company’s attention and seemingly impossible odds, the team was able to get Mercedes’ representatives on their side.
The Tuscaloosa News  
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“I’ve said it for many years: The decision came down to head and heart. In the head, you’ve got all the quantifiable reasons to make a decision like this,” said Linda Paulmeno Sewell, longtime Mercedes employee who was part of the company’s selection committee, in an interview with The Tuscaloosa News in 2017. “But when you make a big decision, pick a home, the person you marry, it’s gotta be about heart.

“More and more as we got to see and know Alabama, it became clearer. For the folks that were going to be making their homes in Alabama, they thought it would be a great.”

The results from MBUSI would take time with the first M-Class rolling off the Vance plant production line in 1997. By the end of the first year, the company had produced 68,800 cars. By the beginning of 2018, the company turned out its 3 millionth vehicle.

In the years since MBUSI’s arrival, both Tuscaloosa and Alabama have drastically changed. The Mercedes plant supports about 3,700 jobs in Tuscaloosa County. Across Alabama, around 40,000 people work in the automotive industry.

MBUSI has also brought in other vendors and suppliers to the area over the years, contributing millions more to the area. In Tuscaloosa County, there are 20 Mercedes suppliers.

Alabama Secretary of Commerce Greg Canfield said Mercedes coming to Alabama had a major effect on how international companies viewed Alabama, especially German ones. By his estimate, there are now about 70 German companies operating in the state.

“By locating its first U.S. manufacturing facility in Tuscaloosa County, Mercedes raised Alabama’s profile for foreign direct investment, particularly from Germany,” Canfield said in an email. “Since 1999, German companies have invested nearly $9 billion in Alabama operations, creating 15,500 direct jobs.”

Canfield also believes Mercedes was the company that led others into the state, such as Hyundai, Honda and Toyota, to do business in Alabama. Hyundai Motor Manufacturing Alabama in Montgomery, which was founded in 2002 and employs 3,000 people, is the only company plant in North America. Honda Manufacturing Alabama in Lincoln was founded in 1999 and employees 4,000. Toyota Motor Manufacturing Alabama in Huntsville, which makes engines for different Toyota models, was founded in 2001 and employs 1,100 people.

Like Canfield, Bonner believes Mercedes’ worldwide reputation for quality encouraged others to come Alabama.

“There’s no way you can prove that had Mercedes not come, we wouldn’t have been in play for other companies, but you can make a strong case that by landing Mercedes, we were not only landing the best, but we were on an international map of recognition,” he said.

State’s top export

In 2017, motor vehicles ranked as Alabama’s top export with nearly $8 billion. That number has potential to grow over the next few years with the announcement earlier this year that Toyota and

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Mazda would build a $1.6 billion plant in Huntsville, bringing in about 4,000 jobs to the area. The plant is set to open sometime in 2021.

According to the Center for Automotive Research, Alabama was tied with Tennessee as the fifth-largest producer of vehicles in the U.S. in 2017. During that time, roughly 9 percent of all the cars and trucks made in the country were produced in Alabama.

"Mercedes helped pave the way for the rapid auto industry growth that has taken place in the state," Canfield said. "In a little more than 20 years, Mercedes, Honda, Hyundai, and Toyota alone have invested a combined $10 billion in Alabama."

Those who worked at the Vance plant have also gone on to different leadership roles around the world. Ola Kaellenius, the plant's third president from 2009 to 2010, was recently named as chief executive officer of Mercedes' parent company, Daimler, leading the company during a shift toward more electric cars.

MBUSI's continued involvement in Alabama is also a sign of hope for the future. In 2015, the company announced a $1.3 billion expansion, adding a new 1.3 million-square-foot body shop and a 140,000 square-foot expansion to the plant's SUV assembly shop. The expansion also includes work on a battery plant at the Vance plant and a Global Logistics Center and a North American hub for after-sales in Bibb County.

"It just helps if you're talking to a global company, you're making a case out here," Sewell said. "It certainly helps to be able to point to a marquee company like Mercedes."

For Bonner, Mercedes and other automotive manufacturers in Alabama are continuing to do good things for the people of Alabama.

"For Alabama, this had a monumental impact on our whole psyche," he said. "We can compete with the very best and if we are successful getting them, we can help them be more successful than they imagined."
Council upturns mayor’s cuts

Decides to chop GulfQuest, city’s i-Team

Lawrence Specker lspecker@al.com

After signaling that it might be well into October before it passed a budget, the Mobile City Council snapped through a series of amendments to Mayor Sandy Stimpson’s fiscal blueprint on Tuesday, then approved the revised version.

Key beneficiaries of council actions:
- Public Works employees will enjoy 5 percent raises.
- Ladd-Peebles Stadium will receive a $750,000 boost.
- The Gulf Coast Challenge, a football game for historically black colleges and universities, will get the same $152,000 allocation as the Reese’s Senior Bowl.
- The Mobile Public Library system won’t face a half-million-dollar cut. Likewise, many arts and social services entities escaped 10 percent cuts.

The dollars that the council doled out — about $2 million — had to come from somewhere else in the budget. The council couldn’t simply increase the bottom line.

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Council

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To that end, the council: cut $496,000 in funding for staff at the GulfQuest maritime museum; cut $181,000 from the administration’s Department of Communications and External Affairs, partially offsetting a planned $272,000 increase; took $750,000 from a $2.8 million liability fund; and slashed spending for an administration initiative called the i-Team, stripping it of the entire $568,000 that Stimpson recommended.

With Joel Davis — the council’s finance committee chairman and Stimpson’s staunchest supporter — out of town on vacation, the other six members passed 10 amendments with nary a dissenting vote. Stimpson had no comment during the proceedings and left the meeting as the final vote took place.

Later in the day, commenting via Twitter, Stimpson was particularly critical of the cut to GulfQuest, saying it could create serious problems with federal grants.

As for the Public Works raises, Stimpson tweeted that he was pleased. He added, “While the council claimed credit for a percent raise, the fact is the administration proposed an increase of more than $900,000 to go toward pay.”

Stimpson’s budget provided revenue to Public Works for incentive pay. The council added some money to that, and decided to give straight raises.

Several council members said that if the administration wants to suggest alternative cuts, they’ll be willing to work with Stimpson and his staff to make those happen.

Councilman John Williams said council members repeatedly had asked the administration for “any assistance that they could give with regard to how to achieve those things that we had targeted during the process.”

“It was in absence of any response with regard to where to get the monies to restore cuts that we felt were unnecessary that the council saw no other means than to act,” Williams said, adding, “I think it’s important to recognize, 99 percent of the budget, as presented, was passed.”

‘GOING WITH THE LIBRARY’

The two biggest questions following the council vote concerned the future of GulfQuest and the i-Team.

GulfQuest opened in 2015 amid high hopes that it could serve as a regional attraction. But it shut in November 2016 to stem ongoing losses from lower-than-projected attendance. Since then, it has operated on a limited basis, with the city providing a little under $500,000 for salaries for a reduced staff, and about the same for operating costs.

Council Vice President Levon Manzie said that if it were a choice between GulfQuest and the library he was “going with the library every time.”

It’s wasn’t clear Tuesday whether the loss of payroll funding would force a second GulfQuest shutdown on Oct. 1, the start of the fiscal year. In any case, a shutdown could be problematic for the city. The museum was partly funded with millions of dollars in federal grants tied specifically to its focus on transportation. Stimpson and other administration figures have warned that if GulfQuest doesn’t live up to its promised role, the federal government could move to claw back that grant money.

Mike Lee, board chair of the nonprofit that runs GulfQuest, said that it was “difficult to believe a rational decision was made by the council.”

“GulfQuest has made monumental progress in the last year in raising private funds, reducing debt, reopening on a full schedule, and attracting the University of Alabama’s Alabama Transportation Institute to come on board as a tenant with a new five-year lease,” Lee said via email. “Also GulfQuest has begun work with Visit Mobile and the city to develop a waterfront-entertainment district.”

Lee said, “Closing GulfQuest would cause massive liabilities for the city for federal grants, loans, and other funding that would have to be repaid, could bloc other city grants in progress for other projects, and be an impediment to the city for future grants and government programs.”

The i-Team, or Innovation Team, has been a signature feature of the Stimpson administration. It was created thanks to a $1.65 million, three-year grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies; when the grant was announced in 2014. Stimpson said it would fund a team dedicated to finding innovative solutions to chronic problems such as urban blight.

Because the i-Team was funded by the grant, it hasn’t previously appeared on the budget. But with the grant money running out, Stimpson’s 2018-19 budget allocated $67,851 to keep the team going.
Airbus: Let’s grow biofuel here

Alabama farmers could lead the way, executives say

Lawrence Specker lspecker@al.com

As JetBlue’s newest A321 flew away from Airbus’ Mobile plant Thursday, it had something different in its tanks — something that leaders of the two companies say could spell new economic opportunity for Alabama.

Powering the jetliner was a fuel mix that’s 85 percent conventional, 15 percent sustainable.

Such fuel has been running various Airbus jets assembled in Toulouse, France, since 2016, but this was a first for the Final Assembly Line in Mobile.

Daryl Taylor, vice president and general manager of the Mobile FAL, said that Airbus is strongly committed to sustainable fuels and to reducing the carbon dioxide that its jets pump into the atmosphere.

As with biodiesel, such aviation fuels are made from renewable resources rather than petroleum. These can range widely, from wood chips to farm crops to algae.

But there’s a supply-and-demand hurdle: The demand has to rise to a point where biofuel production becomes commercially viable, which in turn will bring down its costs. Taylor said that Airbus “wants to leverage our growing investment in Alabama” to help reach that point.

Aviation biofuel could help farmers “create new markets,” ideally without hurting food production or causing other negative consequences, he said. Airbus’ Mobile facility could become a hub for such advancement, he said, and Alabama could be a pioneering state.

SEE AIRBUS, A6
Airbus

FROM A1

"Our goal is to source sustainable fuels in the southeastern United States," said Frederic Eychenne, head of new energies at Airbus. "It is an opportunity to work closely with local stakeholders to scale up production and the commercialization of sustainable aviation fuels in the region."

Echoing Taylor, Eychenne said "We are actively seeking ideas to leverage Airbus' strategy into opportunities for new development in Alabama."

Sophia Mendelsohn, director of sustainability and environmental social governance for JetBlue, said extensive testing has shown that such fuels are safe. She said that sustainable fuels could not only satisfy customer demands for lower pollution but could potentially result in lower airfares in the long run as the fuel supply increases.

JetBlue CEO Robin Hayes said that the company’s goal is to become “a market-maker for renewable jet fuel, creating demand and therefore supporting supply.” JetBlue is “working closely with Airbus to set up infrastructure for more options in the southeast region.”

The Mobile FAL will deliver four more JetBlue jets this year that will rely on a mix of biofuel and regular fuel. According to information provided by Airbus, the fuel was supplied and certified by Air BP and loaded by Signature Flight Support.
New UA building will be named after couple

James and Marilynn Hewson previously donated $15 million

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The University of Alabama's Culverhouse College of Business launched a fundraising campaign Friday for a new academic building that will be named after Marilynn A. Hewson and her husband, James, the alumni who have donated $15 million toward the project.

"The University of Alabama is a special place for James and me," said Marilynn A. Hewson, who is chairwoman, president and CEO of Lockheed Martin Corp. "We met here, we were married here, we worked here. We both launched our careers here."

Standing in front of Bidgood Hall just down the block from the Gorgas House where they were married, the couple said they felt it was important to give back and wanted to make an impact with education.

"It is this place and this building that brought us back," James Hewson said.

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Marilynn and James Hewson formalized a gift of $15 million to the Culverhouse School of Business at the University of Alabama on Friday, Sept. 28. The money will be used to help construction of a new building for the school that will bear the Hewson name. Hewson, the chairwoman, president and chief executive officer of Lockheed Martin, speaks after the ceremony with a group of Alabama students who are interning with her company. [STAFF PHOTO/GARY COSEY JR.]

Online

For video of the University of Alabama's Friday fundraising campaign, go to www.tuscaloosanews.com

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FUNDRAISE

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The Hewsons' gift achieves about half of the goal for the fundraising campaign. The college is trying to raise $30 million, or about half the cost of the 106,000-square-foot new academic building for the business college. Birmingham businessman C.T. Fitzpatrick will lead the campaign's effort to raise the additional $15 million.

The Hewson Hall project is currently budgeted to cost $60 million and will be funded with gifts and university funds. Business college Dean Kay M. Palan said the university hopes to open the new building in 2021.

It will include 22 classrooms, 50 team rooms, exhibition space, office space for faculty and graduate students, and workspace and board rooms for projects. The UA trustees approved the designs for the building last week. The university is planning to build Hewson Hall on the greenspace across Stad- dium Drive from Alston Hall and the Angelo Bruno Business Library.

The Hewsons saw details of the building during a meeting earlier in the day.

"It is going to be a space for collaboration and opportunity that the future generation will grow from," Marillyn Hewson said.

The new facility will help train the next generation of leaders, she said. Hewson hopes the couple's gift will inspire others to give.

"This is a team effort and we hope you decide to be part of the team," Palan said.

The couple made the $15 million gift in Lock- heed Martin stock to the Culverhouse College of Business in July. The university has already liq- uidated the stock, UA Vice President of Advancement Bob Pierce said. At the time, it was the largest one-time financial contribution in the Capstone's history. The University of Alabama System board of trustees accepted the gift last week during its September meeting.

Previous gifts by the alumni couple have supported the Marillyn Hewson Faculty Fellows Program in Data Analytics and Cyber Security, a high-tech Data Analytics and Cyber Security lab and an endowed undergraduate scholarship and graduate assistantship.

Marillyn Hewson is a member of the Culverhouse College of Business Board of Visitors and the UA President's Cabinet.

UA President Stuart Bell said praised the couple's friendship and generosity.

"The Hewsons embody the heart of the universi- ty," Bell said.

Reach Ed Enoch at ed.enoch@tuscaloosa-ne.ws.com or 205-722-0209.
Action Card now available on Apple Wallet

By: Jackson Fuentes

Before Apple publicly rolled out its newest contactless student identification technology via Apple Wallet, Royce Dickerson was selected to test what the UA Action Card Office said is groundbreaking and transformative technology.

Dickerson, a sophomore majoring in management and marketing, said being asked to test the technology was exciting and allowed him to see the usefulness of the service.

“With it being on our phone, it’s going to make it a lot more convenient,” Dickerson said. “Instead of having to go through your bag to find your Action Card, go through your wallet to find that Action Card, just have out your phone, put on the reader and you’re good to go.”

Students at The University of Alabama, Duke University and the University of Oklahoma made history on Oct. 2 as the first Apple consumers to be able to add their student ID cards to Apple Wallet on their iPhones and Apple Watches following Apple’s official launch of the technology.

Any student with an iPhone 6, iPhone 6 Plus or later with updated iOS 12 software and the Apple Watch Series 1 or later with watch OS5 software has the ability to upload their Action Card into their Apple Wallet, according to the Action Card office’s website.

Apple’s Vice President for Internet Services Jennifer Bailey said the technology will be simpler, faster and more secure. Bailey, who is currently ranked the 65th most creative person in business according to Fast Company, also said the technology will provide an easier Action Card experience for students at the University.

“We really do believe this enables students to leave their wallets at home and to be able to just use their devices that they are already carrying with them every day,” Bailey said. “They’ll be able to tap in to all the locations where previously they would have needed to use their physical card.”

Students had been looking for a mobile component of the UA Action Card for two years, said Jeanine Brooks, director of Action Card services.

“Two years ago, we had a resolution from the Student Government Association asking for mobile,” Brooks said. “They wanted the technology that they always had with them, which is their phone, their watch, but it was mobile, and that was important for them.”

After the SGA passed its resolution encouraging the UA ACT Card to go mobile, the Action Card office began to work with Blackboard, who was simultaneously working with Apple. Blackboard then contacted Apple and submitted The University of Alabama as one of the universities across the nation interested in sponsoring Apple’s newest Wallet technology.

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Blackboard is in control of e-Accounts, an app which allows Apple’s Wallet app to add the Action Card. Blackboard is also responsible for the sensors around campus which read the Action Card.

Brooks said the needs came together simultaneously, creating an exciting opportunity that benefited everyone.

“We were very interested in mobile because of the time, and we had told Blackboard that,” Brooks said. “Blackboard had also at the same time was trying to find the right partner for mobile, that was Apple.”

Before converting the infrastructure for the new Action Card, the University chose a common-denominator chip technology that is a version of near-field communication (NFC) called DESFire EV1, Brooks said.

“We had to look at our infrastructure on campus and get all of that converted this summer,” Brooks said. “We had to get all of these different groups and systems together on campus and make sure that everywhere the card’s touching that there is a plan of action and the process had been tested.”

SGA Director of Media Relations Josh Britt, a sophomore majoring in public relations and economics, said the new infrastructure will only serve to benefit students.

“This advancement is going to really, really make student lives easier,” Britt said. “It’s going to be really useful in the coming years because that’s one less thing to carry.”

Apple plans to expand this technology in the future to other universities, Bailey said.

“We’re really excited to bring this to students and to campuses like The University of Alabama, which is really one of the first to be able to create a whole new category of services for Apple Wallet, which you could see in the future for things like other access services like hotel keys or broader corporate access,” Bailey said.

Bailey said college campuses are the right place to launch Apple’s newest contactless identification technology. “It’s a great environment where kids are super active,” Bailey said. “They’re early adopters of technology, and they’ll give us great feedback.”

Students will be able to use their Apple Wallet on their compatible iPhones and Apple Watches to access NCAA athletic events, Bama Dining, campus mail, concessions, laundry, network printing, the student health and recreation centers, the Supe Store and many other features. Work is still in progress to make vending machines compatible with students’ Apple Wallet.

To learn more about Apple Wallet accessibility, visit the Action Card’s website and click on “Where It Can Be Used.”
Feeding the rivalry

Students kick off 25th annual Beat Auburn Beat Hunger food drive

By Ken Roberts
City Editor

Why wait until the Iron Bowl to beat Auburn?

University of Alabama students on Monday kicked off the 25th annual Beat Auburn Beat Hunger food drive, which benefits the West Alabama Food Bank.

During the kickoff of the six-week food drive, students had the opportunity to participate in games and activities at the Ferguson Center Plaza, while a sign-up sheet offered students the chance to take a role in organizing events, gathering food from locations on- and off-campus and providing publicity.

“We have had a lot of success recruiting students to be on staff this year, and we expect about 150 students to be involved,” said Olivia Van Praag, team leader for the food drive, and a UA student. “This should increase our reach on campus and in the community allowing us to help both the West Alabama Food Bank and, hopefully, beat Auburn.”

During the food drive, students with UA’s Center for Service and Leadership compete with the Beat Bama food drive at Auburn University.

The food drive accepts donations of nonperishable food items, along with

See AUBURN, A3

Percentage Nights

These restaurants will donate a portion of their proceeds to Beat Auburn, Beat Hunger during these nights:

- 4-9 p.m. Wednesday at Mooyah, 1130 University Blvd.
- 4-8 p.m. Friday at Panera Bread, 1800 McFarland Blvd. E.
- 10 a.m.-10 p.m. Saturday at Panda Express, 635 15th St. E.
- 5-10 p.m. Oct. 11 at Jason’s Deli, 2300 McFarland Blvd E.
- 4-8 p.m. Oct. 16 at Chipotle, 1203 University Blvd.
- 6-8 p.m. Oct. 17 at the Hunger Banquet in the Ferguson Center Ballroom

Note: More events will be added for Hammer Out Hunger Week, Nov. 5-9

Emily Raye enjoys an inflatable slide during the kickoff for the Beat Auburn Beat Hunger food drive. [STAFF PHOTO/GARY COSBY JR.]

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monetary donations -- $1 equals 2 pounds of food. To make a donation, go to https://beatauburnbeat-hunger.causevox.com. Bins for food donations will be placed around campus and around town. Local restaurants will participate by dedicating a portion of their proceeds to the food drive during Percentage Nights.

Last year, UA won the competition by collecting 260,453 pounds of food, while Auburn University collected 232,544 pounds. This year’s drive will culminate in an announcement of totals on Nov. 16 at the West Alabama Food Bank.

Collectively, the two schools have raised about 6 million pounds of food during the past 25 years.

In Montgomery on Monday, representatives from the UA and Auburn food drives, along with each school’s cheerleaders, mascots and student government presidents, gathered with Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey on the front steps of the Capitol in Montgomery to mark the 25th anniversary of the competition.

“It’s exciting to see these two rivals working for a common goal, and I very much look forward to the good I know that will come from this year’s food drive,” Ivey said.
UAB Health eyes several big projects

The University of Alabama at Birmingham is already in the midst of a building boom, but a number of other multimillion-dollar projects are in the pipeline.

The University of Alabama System Board of Trustees on Sept. 21 gave preliminary, Stage I approval to several UAB projects, including an estimated $80 million project to replace the Spain Rehabilitation Center, a $35 million project for a new logistics center in Avondale and a $10 million medical operations center.

With the projects only in the preliminary stages, a number of details still must be worked out -- including the location of the replacement facility for the Spain Center and the medical operations center.

"We’re still doing a lot of planning (before) we make any final decisions in these projects," said Reid Jones, chief operations officer of UAB Health.

Both the logistics and operations centers project projects represent opportunities to streamline unseen, integral operations for a health system, while the Spain project will involve replacing a landmark facility that has been a critical part of UAB for decades.

The health system said a confluence of factors -- including the age of the facility, changes in the inpatient rehabilitation care industry and bed capacity needs -- necessitate the replacement of the Spain facility, rather than a renovation.

The 155,000-square-foot center, which is located at 1717 Sixth Ave. S., was completed in 1962 with additions in 1969 and 1991.

The interdisciplinary center has been a staple of UAB Health System, with specialties from across the system playing a role.

The health system looked at the costs and benefits of renovating the facility before ultimately deciding that a replacement was the better option.

Arpan Limdi, chief facilities officer and vice president at UAB Medicine, said a number of factors went into the decision, including changes in inpatient care provided at facilities like Spain.

"The kind of care, the intensity of care, the arrangement of services (are) quite different (now)," Limdi said. "The example would be the rehabilitation gyms in an inpatient setting are embedded or adjacent to the nursing units, so it's difficult to achieve that in a fully occupied hospital. And you combine that with the age and the aging infrastructure. It is fundamentally better to replace, and that's what we are evaluating now in greater detail."

Jones said UAB Health is looking at current programming and needs, as well as engaging with consultants like architects as it explores the project.

While no final decision has been made, one possible location for the medical operations center is the General Services Building at 521 19th St. S.

That building already has considerable IT infrastructure, but currently has occupants, and further evaluation of the site is needed, according to UAB officials.

The operations center would bring key departments across the system together to efficiently manage daily patient services.

"The operations center is essentially at 24/7 coordination center though which we can bring all of our daily clinical operations together," Limdi said.

With so much high-intensity activity happening into the evening and at night, having more efficient platform to streamline operations would be a benefit.

As for the logistics center, the facility would be developed at property purchased by UAB Health System adjacent to the UAB Medicine Avondale Business Center.

In addition to its recent property purchase, UAB has been expanding its presence in Avondale in recent years.

In late 2016, it moved hundreds of employees to the buzzy neighborhood, which real estate experts said would be a tremendous benefit for Avondale's growing restaurant and retail scene.

The number of employees at the new logistics center has not been disclosed.

With the health system's high occupancy, the current sterilization operations are running 18 to 24 hours a day, according to Limdi, which creates the need for an offsite logistics facility.

It's a model being embraced by a number of health systems.

As we've reported, UAB is in the midst of a significant surge of building activity, with a number of major projects -- including the new Collat School of Business -- recently completed or underway.
How Southern Research is letting out its secrets

ONE OF BIRMINGHAM’S INNOVATION ASSETS WANTS TO SHED ITS STATUS AS A BEST-KEPT SECRET. HERE’S A LOOK AT THE NEW STRATEGY TO DO JUST THAT.

BY: TY WEST | STAFF
twest@bizjournals.com

Southern Research has been a fixture of Birmingham’s Southside for decades. But to many, much of the work that takes place behind the gates remains a mystery.

But despite the nonprofit’s global credentials, it often flies under the radar.

For some, Southern Research conjures images of Quinan Castle, the distinctive Southside landmark the institute acquired nearly a decade ago.

But a deeper look shows the castle is hardly among the most interesting or noteworthy things happening on the campus.

Across several blocks filled with nondescript buildings, scientists work on projects with global ambitions, attacking complex problems like cancer and neurological disorders, working on defense projects and searching for breakthroughs in green chemistry and renewable energy, among numerous others.

It’s brought a stream of respected researchers and millions of dollars in research funding to the metro area.

But even though a significant number of executives and professionals pass through the campus every day, Southern Research leaders know many still don’t know the scale of what happens on the Southside campus.

It’s a secret the nonprofit’s institute’s leaders want to get out.

“It’s not the greatest fun to be known as the best-kept secret in town,” said Southern Research President and CEO Art Tipton. “So we do want to get the news out.”

As one avenue to accomplish that goal, Southern Research recently launched the Change Campaign, a peer-to-peer community fundraising initiative. It’s a campaign being led by a host of established and emerging business leaders representing several of Birmingham’s largest companies, from Alabama Power Co. and Brasfield & Gorrie to McWane Inc., Protective Life and a number of the city’s largest law firms, among others.

But aside from creating stronger connections between the Birmingham community and Southern Research, another goal is raising funds to provide a critical boost to research efforts amid a particularly competitive time for federal research grant funding.

And that’s a goal that could pave the way for more commercialization coming out of Southern Research – something innovation proponents have long identified as a critical step in the bid to boost innovation-based economic development in the metro area.

Campaign strategy

The foundation for the new campaign grew out of an idea from a Southern Research board member, who initially suggested creating an advisory board.

The group was comprised predominantly of younger executives the institute could turn to for guidance on a range of topics.

Out of that advisory board came a suggestion to go into the community, raise money and highlight some of the specific initiatives and projects underway at Southern Research.

Ultimately, the Change Campaign is highlighting three areas of focus: cancer, neuroscience and green chemistry – three issues with global potential and high impact.

As we’ve noted, there are a number of nonprofits in metro Birmingham that have recently launched multimillion-dollar campaigns.

The Change Campaign isn’t seeking millions. Instead, its team members – called change agents – are looking to raise a combined $200,000. So far, more than $78,000 has been raised.

Those dollars will have a significant impact on the Institute, but Tipton and others say the strategy behind the campaign is one that transcends dollars.

“We’ll do wonderful things with that money. But I think that its lasting fingerprints are going to be beyond that. It’s going to be that we’ve created a few dozen more ambassadors who know the story of Southern Research in our community, and I think that’s going to be a very lasting impact,” Tipton said.
National diversity leader Naomi Sigg to lead workshop at UAH

By: Joyce Anderson-Maples

Nationally recognized diversity leader Naomi Sigg, will lead a diversity and inclusion workshop on the campus of The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) on Thursday, Oct. 18.

Sigg, will present the workshop “Microaggressions Equity and Inclusion: Lessen the Racial Divide to Create an Inclusive and Civil Community,” from 8:30 a.m. to noon in the UAH Conference Training Center inside the University Exhibit Hall. The seminar is free and open to the public, but attendees must preregister. Visit this link to register. The registration deadline is Tuesday, Oct. 9. The workshop is sponsored by the UAH vice president for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

Sigg was named Director of Multicultural Affairs at Case Western Reserve University (CWRU, Cleveland, OH) in October 2013. She works with campus based inclusion and equity programs including the Sustained Dialogue Campus Network and the Diversity 360 Education Initiative.

Since her tenure at CWRU, Sigg has presented her work at various national and regional conferences including the National Conference for Race and Ethnicity, the International Conference on Conflict Resolution Education, and the Ohio Consortium for Multicultural Centers in Higher Education.

Sigg earned a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and a Master of Science in College Student Personnel at Miami University in Oxford, OH. She also serves as president of Sigg and Associates Consulting Group.
Dr. Frances Roberts’ dissertation to be published in conjunction with Alabama’s bicentennial

By: Diana LaChance

Dr. Frances Roberts' 1956 Ph.D. dissertation, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County," will be published next year in conjunction with the state's 200th anniversary celebration. The effort was undertaken by Dr. Thomas Reidy, a lecturer in the Department of History at The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH), with the assistance of Jessica Brodt, a Ph.D. student in the Department's graduate program, and at the behest of the Alabama Bicentennial Commission.

"I'm excited it's going to be accessible to a broader audience, as it's been widely used by scholars for 70 years," says Dr. Reidy, who also provided a foreword to the manuscript. "And I'm really excited it's coming out during the bicentennial – I think it's going to be a must-read for anyone interested in the state's history."

The book recounts the history of the state of Alabama, with an emphasis on the Madison County area, formerly known as the "Great Bend" because of where it sits on the Tennessee River. Up until Dr. Roberts' efforts to record it, explains Dr. Reidy, there hadn't been a complete history written about the foundation of the state since Albert Pickett's tome, "History of Alabama: And incidentally of Georgia and Mississippi from the Earliest Period," which was published in 1851. "She wanted to update some of the ideas and the mythology around the founding of Huntsville and Madison County," he says. "And she used every available source to write it – the document is really loaded with information!"

It helped that Dr. Roberts herself was "an Alabama original," says Dr. Reidy. Born and raised in Gainesville, Ala., she became the first woman to earn a Ph.D. in history at the University of Alabama before going on to become the first chair of UAH's Department of History and the namesake of the university's Roberts Hall. She was later inducted into the Alabama Women's Hall of Fame, thanks in part to her efforts to help establish Huntsville's Old Town and Twickenham historical districts, Huntsville's Constitution Hall Village, the Huntsville Historical Society, and the Huntsville Preservation Society. "She was devoted to UAH and to the community," he says.

The book is being published by the University of Alabama Press and will be available for purchase next summer. Proceeds from its sale will help fund the Frances Cabaniss Roberts Scholarship at UAH, which is awarded to junior- or senior-level students majoring in history and is based on academic merit, citizenship, and leadership. The scholarship was established in 1997 to honor Dr. Roberts' enormous impact on UAH, where she spent 29 years as a teacher and administrator.
BSC president immediately steps down

Greg Garrison ggarrison@al.com

Birmingham-Southern College’s first woman president is stepping down immediately due to health concerns.

Linda Flaherty-Goldsmith had served as president since her appointment in June 2016. She announced in August that she would be stepping down in the spring of 2019, but Monday said it would be sooner.

“As you know, I announced this fall that 2018-19 would be my final academic year as president due to my own family’s needs,” she wrote in a letter to BSC alumni. “I had hoped not to share with you that my own health has been compromised by cancer and associated surgeries I experienced in summer 2017.

“My immune system is vulnerable, and while the role of BSC’s president is a joyful one, it also involves long hours and considerable stress.

“The latest health complication was an emergency appendectomy, and had that been my only issue, I would have bounced back quickly. But I have not. I must finally concede to my family’s wishes that I get the rest needed to allow my immune system to recover.

“So I am stepping down today as president.”

Provost Bradley Caskey has agreed to take over as interim president, she wrote.

Flaherty-Goldsmith was vice chancellor for financial affairs for The University of Alabama System from 1993 to 1998, and prior to that served 13 years in key financial roles at UAB, including vice president for finance and administration.

She also taught leadership in the Culverhouse College of Commerce at the University of Alabama from 1998 to 2000, before establishing a financial and organizational consulting practice.
Charter school earns $1.7M grant

Livingston’s University Charter School will receive money over five years

By Ed Enoch
Staff Writer

The U.S. Department of Education has awarded the University Charter School in Livingston a five-year grant worth at least $1.17 million as part of a program to support and increase the number of high-quality charter schools nationwide.

This grant is funded through the U.S. Department’s Expanding Opportunity Through Quality Charter Schools Program (CSP) National Dissemination competitive grants competition.

“This grant for West Alabama’s University Charter School will help give students the opportunity to excel academically while also building character and responsibility,” U.S. Sen. Richard Shelby said in a statement released by his office. “UCS will have a major impact on the development and progress of students in the Black Belt, preparing them for future professional success. It is my hope that the school can serve as a model for further expansion of rural charter schools.”

The charter school, which opened this fall in Lyon Hall on the University of West Alabama campus, will receive $483,880 in funding during the first two years of the grant. The school will receive $238,435 in year three, $249,853 in year four, and $249,453 in year five, said J.J. Wedgeworth, head of the University Charter School. The school will use the funding to innovate and continue to implement their unique charter school model.

“These funds bring to

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 FRUITION THE TRANSFORMATIONAL IMPACT THAT THIS SCHOOL WILL HAVE ON OUR COMMUNITY AND SHED LIGHT ON THE IMPACT THAT INNOVATIVE RURAL CHARTER SCHOOLS CAN HAVE ON OTHER RURAL COMMUNITIES NATIONALLY. WE ARE SO VERY THANKFUL FOR THE VISION AND WISDOM OF THOSE DILIGENT LEADERS THAT HAVE PAVED THE WAY FOR SUCCESS. UNIVERSITY CHARTER SCHOOL IS GROUNDED IN A ‘SENSE OF PLACE’ AND ITS STUDENTS EXUDE QUALITIES OF COMPASSION, INTEGRITY AND PERSEVERANCE. WE ARE ECSTATIC TO BE BLAZING THE TRAIL TO THE FUTURE OF RURAL EDUCATION,” WEDGEWORTH SAID.

The school opened this fall with pre-kindergarten through eighth grades. It plans to expand, adding a grade level per year, until it reaches pre-k through 12th grade by 2022.

The charter school has an integrated Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) focused, project-based and place-based curriculum, according to its mission statement.
Blazers are preparing for tough road swing

Evan Dudley for AL.com

It only gets tougher from here on out.
UAB is entering the gauntlet of its schedule after opening the season 3-1. The Blazers will hit the road for back-to-back contests — beginning this week at Louisiana Tech — before returning to Legion Field for their Oct. 20 homecoming game against North Texas.

The defense has been dominant — particularly the pass rush and secondary — but has been susceptible to the run, while the offense is steady, though unspectacular at times. There’s much work to be done as the Blazers prepare to face Louisiana Tech, which is coming off a conference win at North Texas.

“We’ve got things we have to correct going into this big game,” coach Bill Clark said. “Obviously, they have a really good team as they always do. They had a huge win against a really good North Texas team, so we are going to have our work cut out for us.”

Although the Blazers have proven their ability to grind out the yardage on the ground as well as anyone in the country, they will have to keep up with Bulldogs quarterback J’Mar Smith, who has developed far beyond the game manager role he embraced last season.

“He is really terrific and he looks like a linebacker and has got a cannon for an arm,” Clark said. “They really vertically stretch you as much as anybody we’ll see. He’s throwing the ball 60-yards down the field and can just flick it. They’re not scared to throw it. They will literally throw the ball down the field over and over and over because they have really talented receivers and are betting on those guys. He’s very good, he’s experienced and he stays alive because he is an athlete.”

Smith, the son of former Alabama defensive lineman Kenny Smith, was solid in defeat last year but has excelled this season, averaging 287.2 passing yards per game — UAB has yet to allow a 200-yard passing performance this year — and has spread the wealth, completing passes to nine different receivers in three of Tech’s first four games.

Blazer cornerback Brontae Harris is all-too aware of Smith’s abilities and believes the Blazers’ pass rush, which leads the conference and is fourth in the nation with 3.75 sacks per game, will be instrumental in slowing down the 6-1, 226-pound Meridian, Miss. native.

“Like a lot of the other quarterbacks, he is good with both the run and the pass,” Harris said. “He can throw the ball extremely well and he can also run. Our pass lanes have to be filled by our defensive line and we have to have integrity to cover our man the whole time, knowing that eventually our line will get there. We have to be prepared up front and on the back end.”

Keeping Smith contained is paramount in Clark’s game plan, especially considering the stakes at hand. UAB and Louisiana Tech are 1-0 in conference play and can take the lead in the west division with a win Saturday.

“It is kind of our standing joke,” Clark said. “What is the most important game? It’s the next one. I know that is coach talk, but every conference game is huge. For us to go on the road and play a team coming off a huge win, and us playing well, that’s where you want to be.

“I don’t want to water it down, other than the fact that next week we will be saying the same thing. We want to keep our heads screwed on but at the same time enjoy this. We know it is going to be a huge challenge and be happy with the fact that we are here getting this opportunity.”
Alabama women’s golf ranked No. 1

Coaches Poll of the 2018-19 regular season began the season.

The Crimson Tide received 12 first-place votes and 335 total points to secure the top spot in the ranking.

4. Vanderbilt
5. LSU
6. Florida
7. South Carolina
8. Georgia
9. Texas A&M
10. Arkansas
Alabama women's golf sets NCAA record

Jiwon Jeon sets UA individual scoring record at Schooner Fall Classic

Staff report

NORMAN, Okla. — The Alabama women's golf team turned in a record-setting performance Sunday to win the 2018 Schooner Fall Classic. The Crimson Tide shot 11-under par in the final round to finish the tournament at -45 and break the NCAA record for team score vs. par by four shots.


Junior Jiwon Jeon and senior Lauren Stephenson finished first and second, respectively, in the individual standings and became the first Tide golfers to shoot under 200 for 54 holes in school history. Jeon (66-64-66/196) finished at -17 to set school records for score and score vs. par over 54 holes. The records come one day after the Daegu, South Korea, native set a UA 36-hole record with a two-round 12-under par 130 at the par 71, 6,048-yard Belmar Golf Club track. Jeon has now recorded five consecutive rounds in the 60s over UA's first two tournaments.

Stephenson (66-65-68/199) also bettered the previous school record of 200 she set last season. Teammate Kristen Gillman shot 200 at last year's Schooner Fall Classic to share the previous record.

Sophomore Angelica Moresco (71-65-70/206) turned in a career-best performance as well, tying for eighth at -7. Gillman (69-68-70/207) tied for 10th at -6 and junior Kenzie Wright (72-72-69/213) tied for 32nd at even par.
Collin Sexton’s name draws attention in fraud case

By: Cecil Hurt

Among the bombshells that have been dropped in federal court in New York this week, where three defendants – including an aspiring agent (and agent runner) Christian Dawkins – are charged with wire fraud and other felonies in the pursuit of high school and college basketball players, the mention of Collin Sexton’s name was probably medium on the explosiveness scale.

Sexton, who played for the University of Alabama last season, earning All-SEC honors before declaring for the NBA Draft, seemed likely to come up at the trials, many of which involve shoe company money from Nike and Adidas. It had come up last fall in connection with a meeting that Sexton’s family had with Rashan Michel, a co-defendant with Auburn assistant coach Chuck Person, who is awaiting trial next February.

The information that was revealed Thursday came from Yahoo Sports’ Dan Wetzel, who more or less owns this story and has been in the New York courtroom from the outset. In Wednesday, Wetzel reported this:

“Among revelations in court this afternoon, documents suggesting Christian Dawkins paid $5,000 to Collin Sexton and another calling for $1,500 per month to Sexton, $21,000 for travel for his family and a four-year job for his brother ($35,000 per year, with $5,000 annual raise).”

There was no follow-up regarding Sexton, who was one of several players mentioned. There is no way to review the documents while the trial is ongoing, so the jury will have to decide the veracity of the payment. There was no way to tell if “calling for” the other money meant that any payment was ever made, or if it was just a suggestion in an attempt to woo a player who eventually signed an NBA contract worth $20.2 million over the next four years. If those are good years, who knows what his next contract would be?

There was no direct mention of Alabama, which investigated Sexton prior to last season, in Wetzel’s report. Alabama officials had no comment on the report from Wetzel, which was to be expected at this point. Frankly, few institutions are commenting because no one knows what is true or false in a criminal trial, no one knows what action, if any, the NCAA is going to take if 40 or 50 schools are implicated and, ultimately, no one seems sure whether the actions are in fact criminal.

Could there be NCAA ramifications for Alabama? It’s possible. It’s also possible that there is no connection between Alabama and Dawkins at all. Guessing what the NCAA will do is difficult in routine cases and these trials are of a huge and unprecedented nature. One has to assume that Alabama knew of Sexton’s high profile and was diligent in its compliance efforts during and
after his recruitment. If the institution was neglectful, then perhaps there is an issue but there’s no way to know yet.

That’s the same situation — or perhaps a less drastic situation — as a laundry list of schools. Jurors were told that schools that could be mentioned included Arizona, Louisville, NC State, Miami, LSU, Oregon, DePaul, Creighton, Texas, Oklahoma State and USC. Players from Texas A&M (Robert Williams) and Mississippi State (Lamar Peters) were mentioned on Wednesday. That’s just this trial and there are, barring plea deals, more to come.

Sexton is a big name. That draws attention. Will it also draw problems? It’s far too early to tell.
Saban calls out UA students for attendance at last game

By Terrin Waack
Sports Writer

Students, this one's for you.
Nick Saban was – and still is – unhappy about the lack of UA students at last Saturday's home game. Alabama defeated Louisiana-Lafayette by a whopping 42 points in Bryant-Denny Stadium, but the 11 a.m. kickoff's recorded attendance was 101,471 people really was not representative of the actual turnout. The student section wasn’t even halfway full.

"I can honestly say I was a little disappointed there weren't more students at the last game," Saban said Wednesday. "I think we're trying to address that. I don't think they're entitled to anything, either.

"Me personally, I think it ought to be first-come, first-serve. If they don't want to come to the game, they don't have to come. But I'm sure there's enough people around here that would like to go to the games and we'd like for them to come too because they support the players.

"I've never said anything like that before. When I first came here, you used to play that tradition thing up there (on the in-stadium big screens) and everybody was cheering and excited and happy and there was great spirit. Now they don't even cheer. They introduce our players and nobody even cheers. So I don't know, maybe there's something else somebody else ought to talk about. Maybe I shouldn't talk about it. Maybe I already talked about it more than I should. So you all can beat me up for that if you want."

Saban also said since he has been here – and he took over the Crimson Tide in 2007 – he has never seen the student section half full like that.

On Monday, Alabama running back Damien Harris expressed his disappointment on Twitter. He quoted tweeted a picture of UA's student section at the start of the game and said, "This makes me sad, if I'm being all the way honest."

The Crimson Tide has been ranked as the No. 1 team in the nation all season and is averaging 54.2 points per game and has outscored opponents 271-05.

There are four home games left.

"Look, our players work See ATTENDANCE, C4"
ATTENDANCE

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too hard and they deserve to have everything and people supporting them in every way and have tremendous spirit for what they've done," Saban said. "They may not be able to continue to do it. We're going to work hard to try to continue that. But there's a part of it where other people need to support them too, and there's got to be a spirit that makes it special to play here, because that's what makes it special to be here. And if that's not here, then does it continue to be special to be here or not? That's the question everybody has to ask. I'm asking it right now."

Legendary recognition

Former Alabama running back Shaun Alexander was named to the SEC's 2018 Football Legends Class, the conference announced Tuesday.

Alexander was a first-team All-American and played for the Crimson Tide from 1996-99. In that time, he set 15 rushing records. His career total yardage mark of 3,565 was untouched until 2015.

During his freshman year, he had a 291-yard rushing performance against LSU. Both his junior and senior seasons then saw him rush more than 1,000 yards.

The Seattle Seahawks picked Alexander in the first round of the 2000 NFL Draft. Five years later, he was chosen as the NFL's Most Valuable Player. In 2011, he was voted into the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame.

Alexander and the rest of the newest Football Legends Class will be honored at the 2018 SEC Football "Weekend of Championship" in Atlanta from Nov. 30 to Dec. 1. There will be a dinner the first night. The group will be recognized prior to the SEC Championship Game at Mercedes-Benz Stadium the next.

Wright absent

Alabama safety Daniel Wright was not at practice Wednesday.

"He's suspended from the team," Saban said. "Violation of team rules."

Wright is not a starter.

Reach Terrin Waack at twaack@tuscaloosanews.com or at 205-722-0229.
Even with press, Tua exceeds the hype

Joseph Goodman
jgoodman@al.com

Alabama quarterback Tua Tagovailoa met with reporters on Tuesday for the first time. It was worth the wait. Tua has jokes.

This kid even makes media scrums enjoyable.

For weeks, reporters had been told that Tua didn’t want to meet with the hacks. He was too focused on ball. Why waste the time?

Well, with Arkansas week here Tagovailoa found time to talk to reporters.

It didn’t take long for him to open up.

Tua is funny, y’all, and he’s personable and apparently he’s trying to bring 1990s hoop earrings back in style. He rocked a pair for his first interview of the season. Boys from Alabaster to Baldwin County will be wearing them next week.

Over the first five weeks of the season, Tua Tagovailoa’s cultural prominence inside the state of Alabama has grown with every touchdown pass. He already has 14 in five games, so he’s about as popular at this point as pickup trucks and peaches. Tide legend Joe Namath never threw that many in a season.

What do you ask Tua after five weeks? How do you sum it all up? Think of the pressure.

“How did you learn that escapability that you’ve shown these first five games,” I asked. “Where did that come from? Is it a drill that you grew up doing? When you do cartwheels out of the pocket and stuff like that.”

Tua smiled and glanced at the ceiling. Tua is gonna be Tua, apparently, no matter how much Saban tries to process him.

“I don’t know,” Tagovailoa cracked. “Sometimes I drop back, and sometimes I just practice back-flipping and throwing, you know?”

See Goodman, B4
Goodman

FROM BI

"Best answer in 11 years," quipped one of Alabama's sports information directors. You laugh, but Tua really can do backflips. He did one off the edge of a waterfall this summer back in Hawaii, and AL.com videographer Laura Goldman was there to witness it.

"I'm kidding," Tua said. "I really couldn't tell you."

But, no joke, this about to be a really fun ride. This Alabama team is something special, and it goes beyond Tua. The starting quarterback seems too good to be true at this point, but the backup might be even better.

How has Jalen Hurts impacted the team? Tua went from funny to serious quicker than one of his first down throws. It was his longest, and most thoughtful answer.

"You guys have seen what happened with Clemson's quarterback," Tua said. "Clemson's quarterback ended up getting hurt, and they didn't have Kelly Bryant as well. Can you imagine if something happened to me?"

"Mac Jones would be good, but also having Jalen here, who is very well experienced, it's a testament to his character. It's a testament to his morals with how he was raised in his family, and just him being here within our team. Everybody respects him so much. So, he's a leader and he leads both ways. He leads vocally and he leads doing things."

The kind of respect Hurts commands on this team cannot be undervalued. He's making a rare sacrifice in this modern age of high-stakes college football. Now the Crimson Tide's backup quarterback, Hurts was once the SEC's Offensive Player of the Year as a freshman. He exhausted his third year of collegiate eligibility in last Saturday's 56-14 victory against Louisiana.

When Hurts trotted onto the field inside Bryant-Denny Stadium, he became something bigger than the game. Never mind thinking about transferring, how do you complain about playing time when you're on the same team as Jalen Hurts?

"With our offense, we've created a very, very special bond with one another," Tagovailoa said.

Together, the team chemistry Alabama's quarterbacks are creating in Tuscaloosa is like something we haven't seen. It goes beyond Saban's influence. It's humbling, and transcends sports.

And there's even time for jokes.

"That was fun," Tagovailoa said after his first interview of the season.

And long overdue.
Tua Tagovailoa staying humble, praising teammates as he leads the top-ranked Crimson Tide

By Terrin Waack
Sports Writer

Tua Tagovailoa brought Hawaii’s “Aloha Spirit” to Alabama whether he knows it or not.

“Everybody is trying to help everybody,” Hawaii sports radio host Bobby Curran said. “That’s really what we think of with the ‘Aloha Spirit,’ very welcoming, very embracing. You reach out first. You don’t wait until someone reaches out to you.”

You see it every time Tagovailoa celebrates a touchdown with fellow quarterbacks Jalen Hurts and Mac Jones, specifically Hurts since the battle for starter was between the junior and Tagovailoa, a sophomore.

It wasn’t until the Thursday before Alabama’s season opener that Tagovailoa found out he would be the No. 1 quarterback. Instead of saving his redshirt and leaving with an extra year of eligibility, like Clemson’s Kelly Bryant did after he lost his starting job to Trevor Lawrence, Hurts decided to stay at Alabama.

“Can you imagine if something happened to me?” Tagovailoa said Tuesday, addressing the media for the first time this season. “Mac Jones would be good, but also having Jalen here, who’s very well experienced, it’s a testament to his character. It’s a testament to his morals, how he was raised within his family. And just him being here with our team, everybody respects him so much. He’s a leader.”

Tagovailoa has nothing but praise for Hurts, even though everyone nationally has been praising him.

ESPN analyst Greg McElroy called Tagovailoa “the most talented quarterback Alabama has had under Nick Saban.” And McElroy was a quarterback at Alabama under Saban from 2007-10.

CBS analyst and former NFL quarterback Gary Danielson said Tagovailoa “plays quarterback like a jazz musician, not like off notes. ... You can just feel it all fit together.”

Even Saban admitted in regards to internal expectations, Tagovailoa has “probably exceeded that to some degree, in terms of consistency.”

“We’re just trying to be 1-0 every week,” Tagovailoa said. “We’re just trying to win games. I think that’s the focus.”

“Coach Saban said I exceeded his expectation, I don’t think I did. He has to be joking with you guys because that’s definitely not what Coach Saban would tell us. There’s always room for improvement.”

Alabama is the best team in the country right now, and Tagovailoa plays a big part in that success. That’s why people in Hawaii are saying “Roll Tide” on Saturdays.

Tua Tagovailoa is 66 of 88 passing for 1,161 yards and 14 touchdowns through five games. He has yet to play a complete game.

See TUA, C4

No. 1 Alabama at Arkansas

When: Saturday at 11 a.m.
Where: Donald W. Reynolds Razorback Stadium
Records: Alabama 5-0, 2-0 SEC; Arkansas 1-4, 0-2 SEC
TV: ESPN
Radio: 95.3 FM, 102.9 FM

Online
For video of Tua Tagovailoa talking with the media, go to www.tuscaloosanews.com

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even though Tagovailoa wasn’t the first player from the Central Pacific islands to make a splash in college football.

The name Marcus Mariota should ring a bell.

“Tua was a little bit in the shadow of Marcus because he’s the first-ever Heisman Trophy winner from Hawaii,” Curran said. “My guess is you’ll soon have two, but who knows.”

Mariota went to the same high school as Tagovailoa (St. Louis), won the Heisman Trophy in 2014 at Oregon and is now the starting quarterback for the Tennessee Titans.

Last Sunday, the Titans beat the Philadelphia Eagles in overtime and Mariota actually credited the “Aloha Spirit” for his poise in the final 16-play winning drive.

“It is gratefulness, it is thankfulness, it is being humble, and understanding that it takes much more than yourself to accomplish something,” Mariota said. “And when you have that in your mind-set, you tend to just go about your business in a calm way.”

His description mirrors that of Tagovailoa, when the younger Samoan explains why his faith keeps him grounded.

“Most definitely not going overboard with things, staying levelheaded, knowing who I am,” Tagovailoa said. “I’d say most definitely with my faith, there’s no room for me with it. It’s always about other people. It’s always about loving on other people and giving praise where praise is due.”

Well, praise is due here: Five games into the season and Tagovailoa has completed 75 percent of his passes for 1,161 yards and 14 touchdowns. That’s without taking a single snap in the fourth quarter.

He went 8-for-8 last weekend. He threw for 387 yards the week before.

Yet, sometimes during the media-viewing portions of practice, Hurts still leads the quarterbacks through drills.

“It was after the Louisville game, a Monday practice getting ready for Arkansas State, Jalen told me to go in front of him because now I’m the starting quarterback and I’m going to be the leader and what-not,” Tagovailoa said. “I told him no. I told him that he still belongs in that role just because of everything that he’s done.”

There’s that “Aloha Spirit.”

“It’s natural to him,” Curran said. “But you probably know this about Tua: He’s a feisty competitive sucker. Don’t mistake the Hawaii part for there not being steel underneath.”

Reach Terrin Waack at twaack@tuscaloosanews.com or at 205-722-0229.
Saban vigilant against possible ‘trap game’

Perhaps Nick Saban is right and this upcoming contest is a trap game for Alabama. Perhaps they all are.

October just started and it’s hard to imagine stumbling in any of the three SEC contests it has scheduled in the month. (There are only four October Saturdays this year and one of those is an open date for the Crimson Tide.) There certainly doesn’t seem to be much chance that anyone is going to line up and try to do straight-on. It would be like putting a golf cart on the tracks and going headfirst into a locomotive. There may be three or four teams in America that could try that — Georgia, Ohio State, possibly Oklahoma or Clemson or maybe LSU in November. Until then, trapping the beast seems to be the only feasible option. The physical prowess is just too much so the hope is that the quarry will be mentally lazy, will ignore the warning signs, will put itself into a predicament that can be exploited.

That’s why Nick Saban said that Arkansas, the next outing, could be “a little bit of a trap game.” He will be on a month-long crusade about wariness, a Smokey Bear (no, that’s not a Coach Bryant reference) reminding his team that only they can prevent penalties, fumbles and missed kicks.

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Alabama has had some of those along the way, although they have shrugged them off by scoring unmatchable point totals.

History says that funny things can happen when you go on the road in the SEC. That's under normal circumstances, though. There have been years in the past when Alabama has had trouble in Fayetteville, Knoxville and Oxford (although, in the first two cases, it is becoming the distant past). The fact that Saban is now 38-7 in SEC road games while coaching at Alabama — three losses at Auburn, one each at LSU, Mississippi State, South Carolina and Ole Miss — is an overlooked but remarkable statistic.

This year, though, through a quirk in the scheduling, three of Alabama's four road games are against Ole Miss, Arkansas and Tennessee who are in transitional periods. Two have new coaches, and one has a coach that was promoted from an interim role to help ride out a stretch of post-NCAA talent issues. That's part of the reason that Alabama has to hear complaints about "the schedule," even though that part of its schedule is beyond its control. Next year's road trips — Texas A&M, South Carolina, Mississippi State and Auburn — may be more daunting. Alabama will still hear about "the schedule," because rival fans aren't in the business of saying "they're just good."

Arkansas does have some of the ingredients for a "trap" in its favor on Saturday. Alabama has to make a long trip for an early kickoff after hearing all week how it's a 35-point favorite, the largest SEC road spread in Crimson Tide history. The Razorbacks are quietly playing better since an early-season loss to North Texas turned into a national embarrassment because a fake fair catch turned into a Mean Green punt return for a touchdown, the highlight going viral on all media. Last week, Arkansas pushed Texas A&M to the final minute (although the Aggies might have had a case of post-Alabama fatigue.)

I don't know if the crowd will be raucous — it's a long drive from Bald Knob or Oil Trough at 6 a.m., especially if you think the Hogs might take a whipping.

Still, Saban is right to stay on guard — if not to avoid a loss, then at least to prevent stagnation.

Reach Cecil Hurt at cecil@tidesports.com or 205-722-0225.
Regarding Jalen Hurts, all the wrong questions were being asked

By: Cecil Hurt

That sound you didn’t hear on Saturday was Alabama’s quarterback controversy.

That’s gone now, after nine months of volcanic eruptions of analysis spewing hot gas into the atmosphere where it has, apparently, dissipated.

Tua Tagovailoa is the starting quarterback, as he should be. One can argue about the level of defensive talent that Alabama has faced, although the Crimson Tide has played one nationally-ranked team (Texas A&M) in its first five games and will have more down the road. One cannot argue that Tagovailoa has not just met the crazy-high expectations he brought into the season. He has surpassed them.

As a result, Jalen Hurts has taken on a backup role. He’s handled it well. He may be in that position for the rest of the season, or Alabama may find itself in an emergency situation, the way Clemson did on Saturday. He’s won the praise of his head coach and of his teammates, much to the surprise of some people who had him ticketed out of Tuscaloosa all summer.

This isn’t a knock at the analysts and commentators out there. One could make a case for Hurts’ transferring before the season, although not a very logical one since he is on track to graduate in December. You could make the case he should have redshirted, playing in just four games so he would get a second year at a different school. He did not write the new redshirt rule and was probably as surprised as anyone when it was put into effect. But it was a consideration after that.

Most of the play-four-and-sit arguments assumed an awful lot — that Hurts would automatically start at his new destination, or that he would be better off with two years to prepare for an NFL career (which sometimes is not the case, as a glance around college football this year reveals). Very few asked one particular question, though.

Is that what Hurts really was required by all logic to do? Or, and I know this is a crazy hypothesis but bear with me here, is he actually doing what he has wanted to do all along? Is he living up to his stated intention since he signed a scholarship, which is play football — not as a guaranteed starter but as a team member — and get a degree? Did he hear the applause from what seems to be an appreciative fan base? Is it just barely, remotely possible he likes the school, likes his teammates, likes being a part of a team that has at least some possibility of winning another national championship? Is he happy with four years of college and not sure if he even wants a fifth?

Like all media members, I don’t know. I haven’t spoken to Hurts since a brief preseason Media Day appearance in a sweltering Bryant-Denny Stadium nearly two months ago. I haven’t spoken to anyone in his family. I’m not a spokesman or a confidant or a psychiatrist. But judging from

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what Nick Saban has said, and from Hurts’ on-the-field demeanor so far, is it that far-fetched to assume he is doing exactly what he wants to do?

Again, that’s just speculation. Like all of it. But it didn’t seem that far-fetched on Saturday. Only more quiet.
First-strike streak continues for Alabama

By Ben Jones
Sports Writer

It took eight plays, but for the fifth-straight time this season, Alabama scored on its first offensive drive. Running back Josh Jacobs kept the streak alive with a 9-yard run to score.

The Crimson Tide has won 20 consecutive games that featured a touchdown on its first drive. That number dates back to the 2014 Sugar Bowl, which Alabama lost to Oklahoma despite putting up points immediately on offense.

When leading at the half, Alabama is 122-7 under Nick Saban. To get even more specific, it’s 106-4 when leading by at least seven points by halftime. The Crimson Tide went into the locker room up 49-0 against the Ragin’ Cajuns and finished with a 56-14 victory.

This also was the first game in 2018 that Alabama scored on every drive through two quarters. Overall, it never punted, but there were two missed field-goal attempts in the second half.

Freshman update

Five Alabama freshmen played in their fifth game of the season, ending the possibility of them receiving a redshirt.

Listed alphabetically, those players are outside linebacker Eyabi Anoma, inside linebacker Ale Kaho, inside linebacker Jaylen Moody, cornerback Patrick Surtain Jr. and wide receiver Jaylen Waddle.

Running back Jerome Ford and cornerback Josh Jobe both played, their fourth games of the season. Neither appeared against Texas A&M.

Punter Skyler DeLong has appeared in four games but did not play Saturday. Alabama did not punt during the game.

Injury update

Both starting offensive tackles left the game early, but neither suffered a serious injury. Left tackle Jonah Williams twisted his ankle but could have re-entered if needed, Saban said. Right tackle Jedrick Wills came out later in the first half but his injury also wasn’t serious.

Redshirt sophomore Chris Owens came in at left tackle. Redshirt junior Matt Womack, last year’s starting right tackle, entered for Wills.

“(Owens) went in there in a big moment,” center Ross Pierschbacher said. “He stepped in and did a really nice job. He’s always been versatile and played multiple positions for us. I think he’s a guy that can play all five. That’s really valuable for us.”

Fixer upper

Alabama did some fast work last week to make the end zone playing area safer after linebacker Dylan Moses collided with an end zone wall while in coverage and suffered a bruise. Athletics director Greg Byrne indicted via his Twitter account more than 40 feet of extra space had been created in the end zone corners.

For his part, Moses didn’t check up on the work.

“I didn’t even look at it,” he said after the game. “I got news that it was changed. It makes you feel pretty good they care so much.”

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Tide bits

Honorary captains were former linebacker/tight end Mike Hall and defensive back Bobby Johns. Hall played from 1966-68 and was an All-American in 1968. Johns was a three-time All-SEC choice during his career from 1965-67 and an All-American in 1967. Game captains were safety Deionte Thompson, outside linebacker Christian Miller and offensive lineman Joshua Casher. Alabama won the toss and chose to receive. Alabama is 3-2 in coin tosses this season. Paid attendance was announced as 101,471. Nick Saban remained undefeated in 14 games against his former assistants. He has also won 77 straight games against unranked teams at Alabama.

The Crimson Tide has won 22 straight games at Bryant-Denny Stadium. Mac Jones’ 94-yard touchdown pass to Jaylen Waddle in the third quarter was tied for the second-longest touchdown pass in school history. Coaching staffs from Alabama and Louisiana-Lafayette wore special arm patches in honor of the American Football Coaches Association’s “Coach to Cure MD” program to raise funding and awareness for muscular dystrophy.

Staff writers Terrin Waack and Tommy Deas contributed to this story.
Isaiah Buggs’ long journey to Tuscaloosa

By: Cecil Hurt

Imagine being a quiet sort, so gentle that your nickname is “Big Pooh,” then having a viral video of yourself telling an entire football team what to do.

Imagine being a high school football player with no college offers to speak of, only to find yourself as a key starter on the most talent-laden team in the NCAA four years later.

If you are Isaiah Buggs, you don’t have to imagine.

Buggs has made a long journey from Ruston, Louisiana, his hometown to Tuscaloosa with a stop in Perkinston, Mississippi, for good measure. Earlier this week, he was named the Southeastern Conference Co-Defensive Player of the Week for his play against Texas A&M but that isn’t the end of the journey. Buggs wants another national championship ring like the one he won in 2017 and while he doesn’t talk about the NFL yet, that destination is possible, too.

He’s not just a football machine, either. He is a rapper. A keyboard player. A basketball player. His Twitter account — @bigpooh_91 — is one of the more active among the Alabama players, whether he is chiding Central Florida for its national championship claim or offering words of encouragement to friends and fans.

“A lot of fire,” Alabama tight end Hale Hentges said on Tuesday when asked to describe Buggs. “He’s an energy-starter for us. He obviously played very well Saturday (against Texas A&M) and did a great job. He’s just a big, physical presence. Anytime you go against him in practice, you know you have to buckle your chinstrap. He brings a lot of energy, a lot of juice. He’s hard to move off the ball. And he obviously can rap pretty well, as you probably heard in the stadium.”

He was even an eye-catcher in the preseason “Training Days” features that ESPN produced for Alabama. At one point, Alabama coach Nick Saban is shouting instructions and the responses from the Crimson Tide players create a cacophony of noise. That is, until Buggs stands up.

“We’ve got too many (expletive) talking,” Buggs said. “Everybody don’t need to talk. There’s the man (pointing to Saban) that needs to talk. Everybody always wanting to say some (expletive). This (again pointing to Saban) is the only man who needs to talk.”

The result? Dead silence.

Back in Ruston, Buggs grew up shy, clinging to his mother, spending time at church where he learned to play the piano while his mother sang.

“My mother is my inspiration in all ways possible,” he said. “She is the First Lady of my life. Just to see her smile makes me happy. She doesn’t live here but she comes to every game so that’s a blessing.”

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She was at every game that he played for Ruston High School, both football and basketball, as well. So even a short recruiting visit was a big decision.

“When you are recruiting for a junior college in Mississippi, you’re only allowed eight out-of-state signees,” said Chad Huff, Buggs’ head coach at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College and now the tight ends coach at the University of South Alabama. “You are careful when you recruit out of state. But Coach (Earvon) Moore, our running backs coach, he had some connections in Ruston that said ‘you need to come see this kid.’

“He didn’t have any D-1 offers, although it’s not right to say he didn’t have any D-1 interest. There were schools looking at him. At that time, he was 240 pounds. You could see the potential. You could see that he was explosive, but you had to project. Plus, he had some issues with his core curriculum and that made junior college a good option for him. Coach Moore went over and he called and said ‘you think he’s good at football, you should see him play basketball.’ And he was good, just a great athlete.

“The main thing for me, though, was when we met him. Just a great young man, soft-spoken. His mom is a great lady. We knew as soon as we visited his home that he would be a good fit.

“He had a bit of an adjustment period, like most players who are away from home for the first time. Junior college was a good option for him, a mutually beneficial situation. He was a great player for us, but he was also a leader, the quiet type. Some guys have that personality where they talk all the time but then when the time comes, you don’t listen to them. The other players just say ‘he’s talking all the time anyway.’

“Isaiah was the opposite. He knew the right time. That’s why he has that video that’s everywhere now. He was a locker room lawyer for us. When he spoke, everybody listened. Then he’d go back to his room and play his keyboard or something.

“When it came time for him to be recruited again, he wasn’t 240 anymore. He weighed 290. He’d had two great years. So there were offers. Lots of offers.”

Most people thought those offers would lead Buggs back to Louisiana. LSU, just three hours or so from Ruston, had a new head coach, a former defensive lineman himself, in Ed Orgeron. He was hired, in large part, to keep Louisiana talent from leaving the state.

One recruiting analyst said in November, a month before the junior college signing period, that there was a “zero percent chance” of Buggs choosing Alabama. But a visit from Alabama assistant Karl Dunbar reassured the Buggs family, and his mother said she would support him at any school he chose.

The decision to sign with Alabama was not popular in his home state. Buggs said on Twitter after that signing day, and again in November 2017 as Alabama prepared to play the Tigers, that LSU fans were saying “horrible things” to him. “Traitor” was about the kindest thing he heard. But Alabama’s win, and eventual national championship, tempered the dialogue.

“It’s cool now, I think,” Buggs said. “Fans just get dried up. I understand that.”
In 2018, Buggs’ play has been enough to cause any opposing school some remorse. He was a preseason All-SEC selection. He’s lived up to that through four games. He has 16 tackles and 5.5 sacks, the best figures among the Alabama defensive linemen. Saban, a stern boss, still wants more consistency but Buggs is ready to supply that.

“I’m a quiet guy,” Buggs said. “But when there’s a war on, I’m ready to go.”