

2008 PIGSKIN PREVIEW



# GEORGIA TECH

## Jackets given an option for change

By Rick Winters  
Rome News-Tribune Sports Writer

The upcoming football season for the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets will be all about change.

The Jackets will have a new coach in Paul Johnson, who brings in a run-oriented option offense, after letting go of Chan Gailey after what the organization thought was another subpar year.

Johnson brings a winning record and the ability to turn teams around in his previous two starts. Johnson started his head coaching career at Georgia Southern where, in his first season, he improved the team's record from 4-7 in 1997 to 10-3 in 1998. He then went on to compile an incredible 62-10 record at GSU before heading to Navy for another resurrection.

Johnson took the Navy program, which was coming off its worst two seasons ever (1-20) and only two winning records in 20 years. After a slow start, Johnson was able to turn the Midshipmen program around and left Navy with a 45-29 record.

"Johnson is the best fit, the best choice for the Georgia Tech head coaching position," said athletic director Dan Radakovich on the team's Web site. "He will educate young men, represent Georgia Tech at the highest level, he will win football games and play for championships."

The new coach, however, will have his work cut out with a Yellow Jacket squad that lost some key players last year.

Gone is starting quarterback Tyler Bennett and probably more importantly running back Tashard Choice. Neither player left a clear cut favorite in their place.

At quarterback, the Jackets have two players returning. They

are Calvin Booker and Josh Nesbitt. Neither player started a game last year.

Johnson could lean toward a freshman starter if Booker or Nesbitt can't prove themselves in practice.

Replacing Choice has been almost an impossible task and so far the position is still undecided. Most likely the position will be given to Jamaal Evans, who had one start last year against Virginia Tech; Roddy Jones, a true freshman last year; or Correy Earls, who is the quickest player on the team and can also play as a wide receiver.

The Jackets will have their top two receivers back from last year, Greg Smith and Demaryius Thomas, who both put up almost identical numbers. The combined for 52 receptions and more than 1,100 yards.

A position that will likely make a big impact this year, making it one of the biggest differences from last year's squad, will be fullback.

In Johnson's offense the fullback has the potential to be the team's leading rusher. Jonathan Dwyer is set to take over the position after the loss of Mike Cox last year. Dwyer rushed for 436 yards in 2007 (5.3 yards per carry) and nine touchdowns. He was a true freshman.

The Jackets will return 17 letter winners on the offensive and defensive line. Most notably is Andrew Gardner on the offensive line and Vance Walker and Darryl Richard on the defensive line. Gardner and Walker were both All-ACC selections in 2007. Walker managed 14 tackles-for-loss and 8.5 sacks. Richard had 11.5 TFLs and 4.5 sacks.

One place the team will not be hurting this season is in the line-backer core. The team returns



File photo / The Associated Press

Freshman quarterback Josh Nesbitt may get the call to lead Georgia Tech this season.

two-thirds of last year's starters including Shane Bowne (34 tackles and three sacks) and Anthony Barnes (29 tackles and 6 TFLs).

Most of the secondary is gone but the team will have back two time starting senior Jahi Word-Daniels (58 tackles).

Former Calhoun High School standout Scott Blair, who showed only some of his talents in 2007 as a letter winner, will take on more responsibility after the loss of star kicker Travis Bell.

Behind Blair's leg last year, the Jackets ranked among the nations leaders in kickoff return yardage defense. Blair should have a chance to punt and kick field goals this year.

Joining Blair on the Jackets squad is another former Calhoun standout, Andy Elakman. Elakman will most likely redshirt his freshman year. Brett White returns as an above average long snapper.

Steven Powers (Model) and Drew Brannon (Rockmart) may also see action this year, with Powers as a reserve on defense and Brannon on offense.

## ACC CAPSULES

It's hard to believe just how much has changed in the ACC during the past 10 years. The conference has become almost unrecognizable, with many of the "haves" now becoming "have-nots" — and vice-versa.

Thumbing through the preseason magazines, you'll find that many football forecasters are expecting Florida State to once again be only an also-ran, while Wake Forest is projected to be a legitimate contender to make the conference championship game.

Virginia Tech, the defending ACC champs, and Clemson are the consensus picks to make this year's title game. Here's a quick look at each of the teams:

### ATLANTIC DIVISION

#### Boston College Eagles

Head coach: Jeff Jagodzinski  
Last year: 11-3 overall, 6-3 ACC

With former quarterback Matt Ryan now wearing an Atlanta Falcons jersey, the Hokies will have to find a new identity on offense. The defending Atlantic Division champs can, however, rely on their defense, which was the nation's second-best against the run last season.

#### Clemson Tigers

Head coach: Tommy Bowden  
Last year: 9-4 overall, 5-3 ACC

Favored by most to win the ACC, the Tigers have 14 returning starters — seven on each side of the ball. Quarterback Cullen Harper and a talented cast of skill-position players give Clemson a chance to be explosive, provided that an inexperienced offensive line matures quickly.

#### Florida State Seminoles

Head coach: Bobby Bowden  
Last year: 7-6 overall, 4-4 ACC

In what could be Bowden's final season, the success of the Seminoles will likely hinge on the play of quarterback Drew Weatherford and running back Antone Smith. The FSU roster contains former Darlington stars Ryan McMahon and Shawn Powell.

#### Maryland Terrapins

Head coach: Ralph Friedgen  
Last year: 6-7 overall, 3-5 ACC

Replacing running backs Lance Ball and Keon Lattimore will be difficult for the Terps. But the Maryland defense should be among the best in the conference, and will keep the Terps in most games.

#### North Carolina State Wolfpack

Head coach: Tom O'Brien  
Last year: 5-7 overall, 3-5 ACC

Although a strong finish last season increased optimism, this could be a long year for the Pack. They have only 10 returning starters, including just four on defense, and have a brutal schedule that features early-season visits to South Carolina and Clemson.

#### Wake Forest Deacons

Head coach: Jim Grobe  
Last year: 9-4 overall, 5-3 ACC

The Deacons, who made a surprising

run to the ACC title in 2006, have nine returning starters on defense, and should be among the stingiest teams in the conference. The Wake roster includes former Darlington stars Derricus Ellis and Chantz McClinic.

### COASTAL DIVISION

#### Duke Blue Devils

Head coach: David Cutcliff  
Last year: 1-11 overall, 0-8 ACC

The arrival of Cutcliff has generated a buzz in Durham, but the fans will likely need to be patient with the new coach. He has some talented players at his disposal, but the Devils aren't likely to turn any corners this year.

#### Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets

Head coach: Paul Johnson  
Last year: 7-6 overall, 4-4 ACC

Johnson, the former Navy coach, has implemented a triple-option attack at Tech, which should serve the Jackets well in the long run. But this year? Look for some growing pains from a team that has just four returning starters on each side of the ball. The Tech roster includes several former Greater Rome stars: Steven Powers (Model), Drew Brannon (Rockmart), Scott Blair (Calhoun) and Andy Elakman (Calhoun).

#### Miami Hurricanes

Head coach: Randy Shannon  
Last year: 5-7 overall, 2-6 ACC

Miami has three players competing for the starting QB job — and all of them are freshmen. On the upside, the Hurricanes' backfield will feature the dangerous tandem of Graig Copper and Javarrius James, who are bona fide playmakers. Miami isn't likely to win the Coastal Division, but they could pull off an upset or two.

#### North Carolina Tar Heels

Head coach: Butch Davis  
Last year: 4-8 overall, 3-5 ACC

With 17 returning starters, the Heels have a chance to make some noise this season, especially if they learn how to win close games. (They lost six games last season by a touchdown or less).

#### Virginia Cavaliers

Head coach: Al Groh  
Last year: 9-4 overall, 6-2 ACC

Coming off their best season since 2002, the Cavs are optimistic about their chances in the Coastal Division. But the good vibes could be short-lived for the Cavs, who have just 11 returning starters. And they will get tested immediately: They open the season against Southern Cal.

#### Virginia Tech Hokies

Head coach: Frank Beamer  
Last year: 11-3 overall, 8-1 ACC

The Hokies are the hot pick to win the division title, but it might not be so easy. They will have to replace seven starters on defense, and the Hokies' two-QB system that worked so well last year — with Sean Glennon or Tyrod Taylor sharing the duties — could prove to be a distraction.

Compiled by David Dawson

## Perrilloux, JSU get test at Tech

By Shannon Fagan  
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JACKSONVILLE, Ala. — Character.

That word means a lot of things to a lot of people, and for Jacksonville State football coach Jack Crowe, character was something he felt his team was lacking at the end of the Gamecocks' 2007 season, especially in a 32-25 loss at Southeast Missouri.

Crowe felt he needed to "get new blood in here, and we did."

"Preaching to guys like I did about stuff did not work," Crowe said. "That's when coaches either say 'I'm too old. I'm getting out,' or they change."

Crowe chose the latter. In the months since the Gamecocks' season ended, Crowe made it his mission to put the pieces in place he believes will give his team the character it takes to make it successful once again.

A major decision Crowe made was to kick starting quarterback Cedric Johnson off the team during the off-season for disciplinary reasons, leaving the Gamecocks very thin at the position.

Enter much ballyhoed quarterback Ryan Perrilloux, who makes his debut with the Gamecocks in a big way Thurs-

day night when JSU heads to Atlanta to face Georgia Tech.

Perrilloux himself had repeated off-the-field problems. While playing last season for national champion LSU, he was suspended three times which eventually led to his release.

Perrilloux was caught trying to enter a Baton Rouge casino with false identification last summer. He was suspended after being involved in a nightclub fight last November and was suspended again in February after missing a team meeting, skipping classes and being late for team workouts.

Upon his release from LSU, Crowe decided to give the oft-troubled quarterback another chance. He talked to numerous coaches and administrators that knew Perrilloux, and met with Perrilloux himself.

Perrilloux eventually landed at Jacksonville State in mid-May, and despite the heat Crowe has taken for making the decision to sign Perrilloux, he's seen nothing in the quarterback to make him think his controversial decision has been a bad one.

"I think your quarterback is your highest profile player," Crowe said last Thursday at the team's media day. "I think if he lacks character, then it would

be hard for you to say you've got character on your football team."

Perrilloux, a self-described "fun guy" and "not the thug they say I am," said he's looking to put the past behind him.

"I've been working out, going to school, being on task and on time. Basically, I'm just trying to get ready for the season," Perrilloux said. "I'm still adjusting to the slow-pace movement of the town. It's a great environment."

One of Perrilloux's new teammates, Preseason All-Ohio Valley Conference return specialist and Cherokee County High School grad Maurice Dupree, said his presence has uplifted the team.

"Him coming in has been a big plus to our program," Dupree said. "We're getting a little more publicity. Just with him here, everybody is so excited about the season."

"There's some big things that are going to happen this year. Everybody's just excited and ready to go."



Ryan Perrilloux, who led LSU to the SEC title last year, is now the quarterback at Jacksonville St.



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