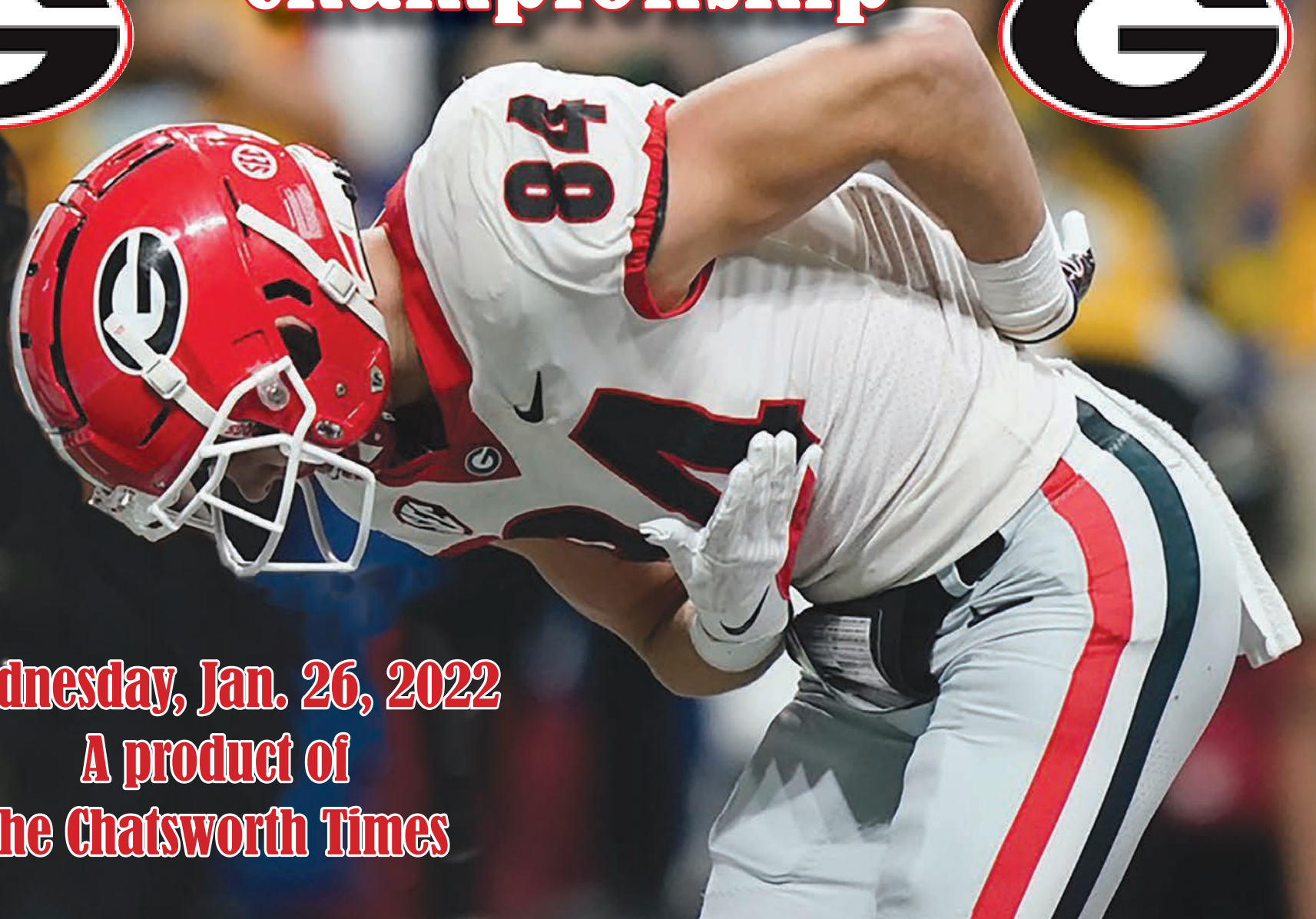


Dawgs take a bow

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Wednesday, Jan. 26, 2022

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Bulldogs delivered when it counted most

By **Ralph D. Russo**

AP COLLEGE FOOTBALL WRITER

INDIANAPOLIS — Confetti rained down on Georgia. The Bulldogs fans chanted “Kir-by, Kir-by!”

Four decades of pent-up emotion were unleashed Monday night as the Bulldogs snapped a frustrating national championship drought by vanquishing their nemesis.

Stetson Bennett delivered the biggest throws of his storybook career and Georgia’s defense sealed the sweetest victory in program history, beating Alabama 33-18 in the College Football Playoff for its first title in 41 years.

“I’ve never been around a group of players that really wanted it so bad and wouldn’t be denied,” Georgia coach Kirby Smart said. “I told the guys in the locker room, just take a picture of this.”



Coach Kirby Smart and safety Lewis Cine celebrate on the podium after title victory.

Smart, a Bulldogs defensive back in the mid-1990s, returned to his

alma mater in 2016 after helping Nick Saban build a dynasty as an assistant

at Alabama.

Georgia has become an elite program under Smart, but has not been able to chase down its Southeastern Conference rival.

Until now.

“This was for all the glory, we took it,” defensive tackle Jordan Davis said.

And they did it the way Alabama has broken their hearts so many times in recent years: Coming from behind and finishing with a flourish.

Bennett connected with Adonai Mitchell on a 40-yard touchdown to give No. 3 Georgia a 19-18 lead with 8:09 left and then hooked up with Brock Bowers for a 15-yard TD on a screen to put the Bulldogs up eight with 3:33 left.

The final blow came from Georgia’s dominant defense. Kelee Ringo

SEE **DELIVERED**, PAGE 6



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Bulldogs will send elite talent to the NFL draft

By Jimmy Espy
EDITOR

The number of University Georgia football players expected to be drafted by the National Football League this year is a testament to the recruiting prowess of Coach Kirby Smart and his staff.

NFL scouts have known for some time this Georgia team was loaded with pro prospects, but the Bulldogs impressive win over Alabama in the National Championship game illustrated how talented and deep the Georgia roster was.

Of course, a lot of things could happen between now and draft day April 28-30) but at this point it seems likely more than a dozen Georgia players will be drafted.

POSSIBLE FIRST ROUNDERS

Linebacker Nakobi Dean is the top UGA prospect, according to most sources. The 6-0, 225-pound lineback-

er has excellent speed and instincts. He could be the first linebacker drafted.

At 6-6, 340 pounds, defensive tackle Jordan Davis is a massive run-stopper in the mold of Tampa Bay's Vita Vea. If Davis were a better pass rusher he'd be a top five pick. As he is, he's still a first round talent.

Davis's running mate at defensive tackle, Devonte Wyatt, isn't as big (only 6-3, 315) but does get to the quarterback more. He has the build NFL scouts love.

Fellow defensive lineman Travon Walker (6-5, 275) has the ideal physical skills to play end in a 3-4.

HIGH PICKS (2-3 ROUND)

Safety Lewis Cine is a terrific tackler with good size 6-1, 200) and speed.

Cornerback Derion Kendrick had a terrific senior season at Georgia after some rocky times at Clemson. He has excellent size and ball skills, but his speed has been questioned. If he runs

a good 40 for scouts, his stock will rise quickly.

Wide receiver George Pickens only caught passes this seasons but did enough his first two years at Georgia to tantalize scouts. At 6-3, 200 pounds, Pickens is physical and shows good hands. He's been a deep threat at UGA, despite lacking elite speed.

Linebackers Quay Walker and Channing Tindall have NFL size and good stat sheets. Fast 40 times would boost both these players considerably. There are not enough good linebackers in the NFL and both these players should have jobs soon. Look for Walker to go in the second round, Tindall a round later.

James Cook, brother of NFL Pro Bowler Dalvin Cook, may be the most underrated Bulldog. He's a speedster who developed into a tough inside runner at Georgia. He catches the ball well and isn't afraid to block. Cook will be a nice asset for some team's offense.

Jamaree Salyer (6-4, 325) is another underrated player. He's powerful and versatile. Salyer is experienced at left tackle but could be moved inside to guard, as was shown in the National Championship game. I wouldn't be shocked to see him go as high as late first round.

MID TO LATE ROUNDERS

The NFL has cooled on drafting running backs high, but somebody will get a good value in Zamir "Zeus" White. The senior lost weight and got quicker in his four years at Georgia and showed a lot of toughness.

Senior Justin Shaffer was unheralded but effective at guard. He will get a shot in the league.

Tight end John Fitzpatrick split time with two younger players at UGA but was a consistent presence. He has prototype size at 6-7, 250.

Not many punters are drafted but Jake Camrada has a very good chance to go in the late rounds.

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DELIVERED: Georgia captures its first National Championship in 41 years

FROM PAGE 3

intercepted an underthrown deep ball down the sideline by Heisman Trophy winner Bryce Young.

“I just saw the ball in his hands and that was all she wrote,” said safety Lewis Cine, the game’s defensive MVP.

With just over a minute left, Ringo took off behind a convoy of blockers and went 79 yards, Smart chasing and yelling at him to go down so he wouldn’t risk a fumble. The touchdown set off a wild celebration by the relieved Georgia fans who packed Lucas Oil Stadium.

“There’s going to be some property torn up in Indianapolis tonight,” Smart said, paraphrasing the late Georgia play-by-play man Larry Munson.

The Bulldogs (14-1) hadn’t won a national title since freshman Herschel Walker led them there in 1980. If simply snapping the drought wasn’t good enough, doing it against No. 1

Alabama (13-2) made it even better.

“I cried, so pretty good,” Bennett said when asked how it felt.

Saban’s Tide had won seven straight against the Bulldogs.

The Bulldogs lost two SEC championship games, including one five weeks ago, and the 2018 CFP title game to Alabama under Smart.

“I told them we burned the boats. The only way home was through them,” Smart said.

Mission accomplished.

Bennett, the former walk-on turned starter, finished 17 for 26 for 224 yards and no interceptions.

For most of the first three quarters, the first CFP title game to be a rematch of a regular-season game was an ol’ fashion SEC defensive struggle in the heart of Big Ten country.

The first touchdown came with 1:20 left in the third quarter. After James Cook broke a 67-yard run to get the Bulldogs into the red zone, three more running plays — and a facemask penalty by Alabama — got



The rise of quarterback Stetson Bennett was one of the game’s most dramatic stories.

them into the end zone. Zamir White went in standing up from a yard out with massive defensive tackles Jalen Carter and Davis leading the way as blockers. The Bulldogs led for the first time, 13-9.

After Alabama added another field goal, the Tide caught a break on strange turnover.

As Bennett was being taken down deep in Georgia territory, he tried to throw the ball away. The ball slipped loose, and bounced toward the sideline, seemingly harmless. Alabama’s Brian Branch casually caught it as he was jogging out of bounds.

Surprisingly, the ruling on the field was a fumble, recovered by the Tide and replay upheld it, giving the Tide the ball in the red zone. A few plays later, Young eluded the rush and found Cameron Latu for a 3-yard touchdown that put Alabama up 18-13 with 10:14 left.

Once again, it seemed as if Georgia would not be able to break the ‘Bama curse.

Bennett was 13 for 22 for 141 yards as the next drive started, and you could practically hear all skeptical Georgia fans wondering why Smart didn’t turn to his four-star back-up QB, J.T. Daniels, for a spark.

As he has done so many times during a career that started on the

scout team and took a detour through junior college in Mississippi, the small-town Georgia kid nicknamed “The Mailman” came through.

Bennett completed all three of his passes for 68 yards, including a long strike to Mitchell for a touchdown with 8:09 left that gave the Bulldogs a one-point lead after a failed 2-point conversion.

The Bulldogs’ defense clamped down on Young, forcing a three-and-out on the Tide’s next drive, and then Georgia went to work on sealing a long-awaited championship.

“It’s a little tough that I let them down today,” Young said. “I’ve got to do better with it.”

The sophomore finished 35 for 57 for 359 yards with two interceptions, playing without his top two receivers for most of the game. All-American Jameson Williams went out early in the second quarter with a knee injury, and John Metchie III was injured in the SEC title game.

Young was sacked three times after Georgia didn’t bring him down once in the first meeting.

After more than 40 years, it was Georgia’s time to finish.

“You put as much time as we do in this thing, blood, sweat, tears,” Bennett said, “it means something.”



**CONGRATULATIONS
to the Georgia Bulldogs
on your National
Championship title!**

Ladd McConkey, congratulations on a year full of memories as a Bulldog that will last a lifetime. May God continue to bless you.

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Ringo TD capped amazing season by Bulldog defense

By Charles Odum
AP SPORTS WRITER

Georgia won its long-awaited national championship the way it dominated during an undefeated regular season — by relying on its defense.

The Bulldogs allowed only 30 yards rushing in beating Alabama 33-18 in Indianapolis. Georgia (14-1) won its first national title since the 1980 season.

“I hope it doesn’t take that long again,” Georgia coach Kirby Smart said.

The clinching touchdown came on cornerback Kelee Ringo’s 79-yard interception return with less than a minute remaining.

Quarterback Stetson Bennett gave credit to the defense for the championship win.

“First of all, it was the defense that kept us in this game while we were stumbling over our own feet in the

first half,” Bennett said. “They won this game for us.”

It was redemption for a unit that hadn’t allowed more than 17 points in a game before being humbled in its 41-24 loss to Alabama in the Southeastern Conference championship game on Dec. 4.

“We talked about putting it on our shoulders and it was on us,” linebacker Nakobe Dean said. “We knew when we took the lead if they don’t score no more, they don’t win.”

CONFIDENT

The defense regained its swagger with a 34-11 semifinal win over Michigan. Winning the rematch with Alabama (13-2) was the crowning achievement for Smart and his defense.

The Bulldogs entered the championship game allowing a nation-best 9.6 points per game.

“I think our defense is definitely

in the history books for what we’ve done all year,” said safety Lewis Cine, named the defensive player of the game. “Credit to the coaches. Credit to the players. We definitely made the history books.”

Cine had seven tackles, including one for a loss.

Held without a sack in the loss to Alabama in Atlanta, Georgia’s defense appeared to break through on the fourth play of the game.

Defensive tackle Jordan Davis reached Alabama quarterback Bryce Young for an apparent sack. Young lost control of the ball, and linebacker Nakobe Dean scooped it up and ran for what was called a touchdown by the officials.

Following a review, the play was ruled an incomplete pass. Officials ruled Young’s arm was going forward as he was tossed to the ground. The Crimson Tide’s drive continued and ended with a field goal.

Linebacker Channing Tindall gave Georgia its long-awaited first sack of Young, for a loss of 13 yards, in the second quarter as the Crimson Tide again settled for a field goal by Will Reichard.

Tindall and Quay Walker each had eight tackles.

CRUNCH TIME

Georgia took a 19-18 lead on Bennett’s 40-yard touchdown pass to Adonai Mitchell. The defense then stopped Alabama without a first down. The Crimson Tide’s punt set up Bennett’s 15-yard touchdown pass to tight end Brock Bowers to stretch the lead to eight points.

The defense ruled the remainder of the game.

“We took the challenge,” Dean said. “We knew every time they got to the red area we were going to bow our necks and do what we needed to do.”

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‘... all I was worried about was winning the game’

By Erik Green
SPORTS EDITOR

When Ladd McConkey first walked onto the field at North Murray he was a 110-pound freshman. The last time he walked off the field, he was a receiver for the National Champion Georgia Bulldogs.

“Obviously, it’s been an amazing year,” McConkey said on Sunday. “The way it ended, it capped everything off the right way. It’s really been special. That’s the only way I can describe it.”

It’s been some journey for the finance major with wicked speed and an electric smile. Most people in his position would have given up football years ago. He was undersized for pretty much any position, broke a few bones, and believed himself to be a basketball player. In fact, his exploits in middle school basketball

are the stuff of legend.

Instead, he stuck with football and in the last months of his high school career was awarded a scholarship by the Dawgs. He was a lifelong Tennessee fan but “there was no way I could turn down that offer,” he said.

“Everyone knows I was under-recruited and didn’t know where I was going to go,” said McConkey, a red-shirt freshman. “My family was just encouraging me to wait on it and it’ll happen...when I got there (to UGA) it was unreal. My visit the whole time was awesome.”

After spending his first year on the scout team, McConkey broke out this season. He caught 31 passes for 447 yards and five touchdowns, averaging almost 15 yards per catch. Now listed as 6-feet, 185-pounds, McConkey no longer gets pushed around. Still, his skillset is the speed game as a slot receiver, often going against



PHOTO BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

North Murray graduate Ladd McConkey played an important role in the National Championship season of the Georgia Bulldogs.

slower linebackers and safeties. He can get from point A to point B with suddenness. His biggest game was against Auburn when he caught five passes for 135 yards and a touchdown.

“On the scout team, it was a struggle at times,” said McConkey, who is known for his powerful work ethic and perfectionism, especially in the classroom. “Going from playing every snap in high school to practicing everyday and not really feeling like you’re getting rewarded for it. But I kept grinding and grinding. It all paid off and now we’re national champions.”

Against Alabama in the national championship game, McConkey had one catch for three yards. He didn’t care. Winning that ring was all that mattered.

“Obviously you want to have indi-

vidual success, everybody does,” he said. “At that point in time, it was like all I was worried about was winning the game.”

McConkey and the Dawgs lost to Alabama in the SEC Championship after a previously unbeaten season. He said he and his teammates didn’t get down about it; they just resolved to improve and they knew there was a chance at a rematch.

“I think immediately it was like, all right, let’s get back to work,” McConkey said. “Let’s prepare for whoever is next. A big part of our season was getting beat and like, hey, let’s turn this around. We can’t have any more letdowns.”

The Dawgs turned it around, indeed, after losing to Alabama and

SEE **MCCONKEY**, PAGE 9



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MCCONKEY: Murray native, teammates win historic game for Bulldogs

FROM PAGE 8

thumped Michigan 34-11 in the playoff game. Then they made the most of their opportunity at payback against the Tide, winning 33-18.

“It was awesome,” McConkey said. “At times, I feel like I didn’t even really soak it up too much. After the game I was talking to my family and they were asking how it felt and it’s crazy, but I don’t know if it has even set in yet that we’re national champions. To be on that stage and compete at a high level, it really was awesome. It’s a thrill.”

Georgia played in a number of big games during the season. None, however, matched the national championship in intensity or importance. It had been since 1980 since anyone had witnessed a UGA national championship. McConkey, of course, wasn’t even born then.

“I saw something that said receivers were in a three point stance the last time Georgia won one,” McConkey joked. “It’s crazy thinking back on it. Being a Tennessee fan growing up, not really understanding how important it was to Georgia to win a national championship and how badly people wanted it. When I got to be a part of it, I was like these guys



McConkey

are serious.”

The hype leading up to the game was enormous, with around the clock national media attention. Fans made the long drive from Georgia to Indianapolis, perhaps riding alongside Tide backers from neighboring Alabama. Prognosticators made Georgia a 2.5 point favorite, according to Forbes. The Dawgs were looking for their first win against the Crimson Tide since 2007. There was a lot at stake. McConkey pointed to those high stakes when asked what set the national championship apart from other games.

“Those high stakes and knowing how important it was to my teammates and me, my coaches, and the fans that have wanted it for so long,” he said. “So I

think that was the biggest thing, just how special we knew the opportunity was. I felt like we had the majority of the fans there so that was great to have them show up. It’s not an easy drive when it was about negative degrees outside.”

Once things unfolded on the field, McConkey said he was locked in and focused but the game was very surreal. Moments that stood out included the “pick six” at the end of the game by Kelee Ringo and seeing the jubilation on the faces of the fans in the stands.

“Seeing all the fans there, it was something special,” he said.

The fact that he is a part of, perhaps, a Georgia football renaissance isn’t lost on McConkey. He’s enjoying every moment of this stage in Dawgs history.

“Someone asked me yesterday when we would be getting our rings,” McConkey said. “I don’t know, hopefully soon. I’m excited.”

McConkey will return to the lineup as a redshirt sophomore next year and is prepared to step into any role he’s offered next year. Undoubtedly, the grinning kid from Chatsworth will be called on to provide leadership.

Georgia opens the 2022 season on Sept. 3 against Oregon at Mercedes Benz Stadium in Atlanta.

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**Jimmy Espy, Sherri Jenkins, Kelly Cardozo,
Jeremy Morgan, and Erik Green**

Georgia scours the country for top football talent

By Jimmy Espy
EDITOR

Elite college football programs have the ability to draw quality recruits from all over the country.

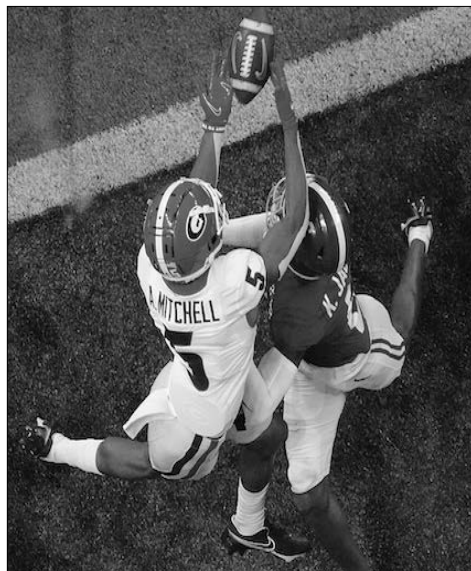
The University of Georgia program was able to do that under former coach Mark Richt, but current coach Kirby Smart has enhanced the Dawgs' recruiting capabilities to a new level.

Just look at the "geographic composition" of the team that beat Alabama for the National Championship.

While the talent-rich state of Georgia remains the core recruiting area for Smart and his staff, the Bulldogs also demonstrated a long reach to bring in even more prime talent.

You wouldn't think California would be a key recruiting area for Georgia, but it has been.

Freshman tight end Brock Bowers, (56 catches, 13 touchdowns) who may



A.D. Mitchell scores on 40-yard pass.

have the best player in the country at his position, played his high school

football in Napa, Cal., an area much better known for wine than football players,

Quarterback J.T. Daniels of Irvine transferred to Athens from USC. Running back Kendall Milton, who could be the team's top back next season, is from Fresno while wide receiver Jermaine Burton grew up in Calabasas.

The Bulldogs brought in several other top notch players from west of the Mississippi.

Texans Adonai "A.D." Mitchell and Lewis Cine were good all season and made big plays in the National Championship game.

Mitchell took the football away from an Alabama defender for a 40-yard TD catch that put Georgia back in the lead over Alabama, 19-18. He played for Cane Ridge High School in Missouri City, Tex.

Cine (Trinity Christian High in Cedar Hill, Tex.) led the Georgia secondary with seven tackles.

Big tight end Darnell Washington came from Las Vegas, and cornerback Kelee Ringo, whose interception and touchdown return locked up the victory for Georgia, played his high school football in Saugaro, Arizona.

No region of the country produces better talent than the Southeast and Georgia's championship rosters included many top notch players recruited from across the South.

Running backs James Cook (Florida) and Zamir White (North Carolina) powered the team's running game.

Wide receiver Georgia Pickens played high school ball in Hoover, Ala.

South Carolina produced a couple of very productive Bulldogs, cornerback Derion Kendrick and linebacker Channing Tindall.

Most of Georgia's big defensive front seven came from the Peach State, except for sophomore Jalen Carter of North Carolina.

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Love, Momma, Daddy, Hint, Laine, Molly, and Syd
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Grannie Mc & Billy
Bekah & Cass**

Go Dawgs! Go #84!

