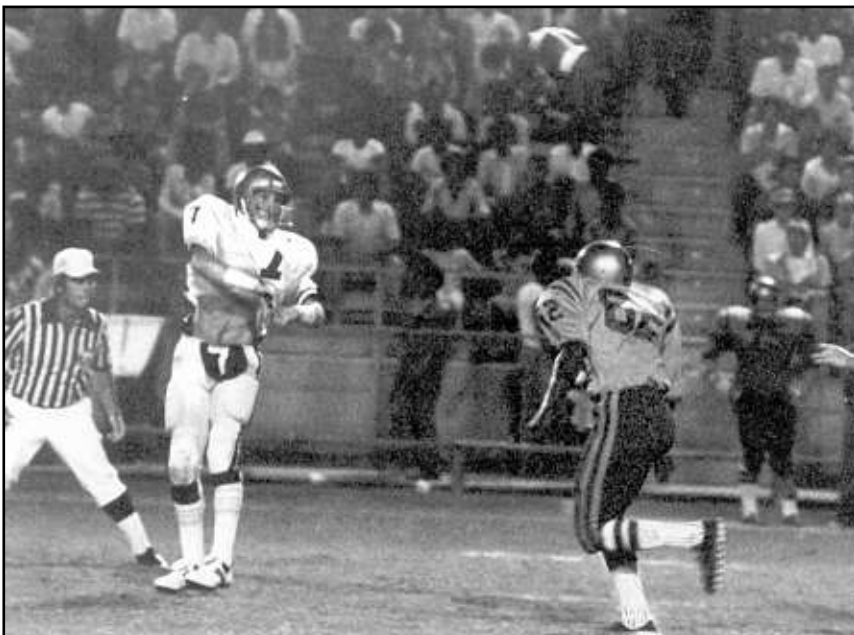


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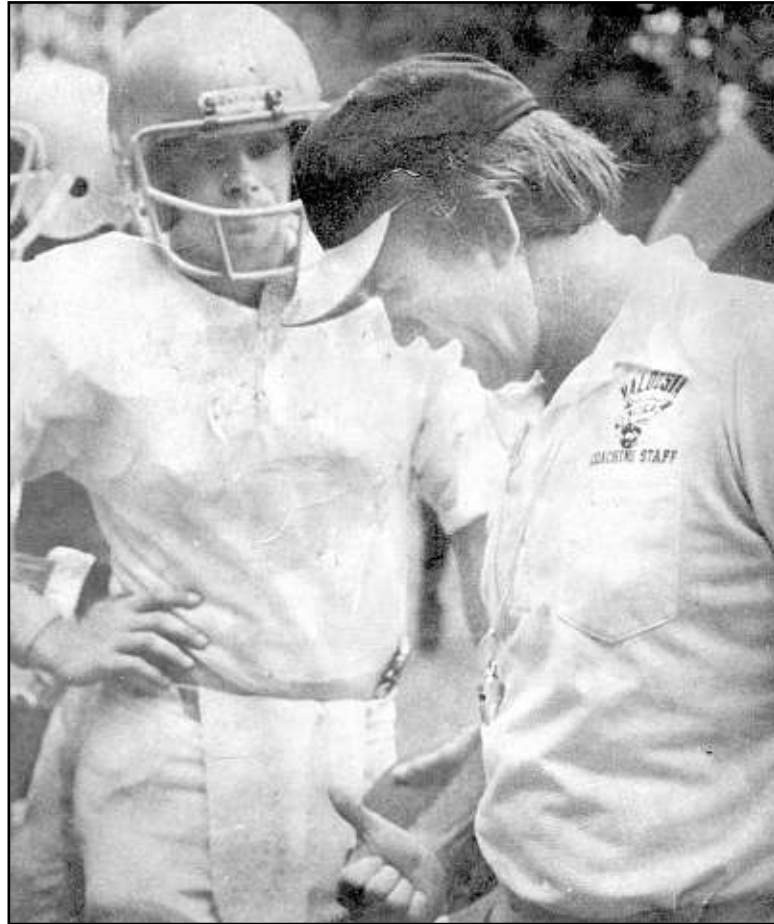
Sunday, March 25, 2007

From VHS Wildcats to UGA Bulldogs to radio

Belue quarterbacked Valdosta to state title game, Georgia to national championship

BY BRYAN FAZIO

The Valdosta Daily Times



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Valdosta High head coach Nick Hyder talks with quarterback Buck Belue during football camp in Twin Lakes in 1977. The Wildcats would go 12-2 that season and play for the state championship.

claimed were interceptions left and right, instead of being turned away, he was inspired to work harder for the next season by Valdosta's new coach.

"On Monday, Nick Hyder said, 'If you want to start next season, I'll see you in there Monday lifting weights,'" Belue said.

Belue was in there that next Monday.

Belue's football career at Valdosta was a product of his hard work. He remains the only Wildcats quarterback to start every game from his freshman through his senior years.

He led the Wildcats to a 34-14 record in those four seasons, and was named to the Parade All-American Team in 1977.

Valdosta lost seven games Belue's freshman year. They lost seven more over the next three

years combined.

After graduating from Valdosta, he went on to play baseball and football for the Bulldogs, where he became a figure of legend.

He quarterbacked Georgia from 1978 to 1981, where he helped the Bulldogs win the national championship in 1980, win back-to-back SEC Titles in '80 and '81 and make consecutive Sugar Bowl appearances.

His 27-3 record as a starter is the ninth-best quarterback ledger in college football history.

Belue also threw what may have been the most famous pass in Bulldogs history, a 92-yard touchdown pass to Lindsay Scott with just over a minute to play, which gave Georgia a 27-21 win over Florida in 1980, and put the team in position to win the national cham-

pionship. That touchdown is still tied for the longest in Bulldogs history.

He also had a very good baseball career: Belue was a two-time All-SEC outfielder. His .356 career batting average ranks in the top 10 all-time in school history.

Belue starred in two sports, and that is where most of his focus was delivered. When teachers asked in third grade what he wanted to do when he grew up, Belue's response was fitting.

"Other than baseball and football," Belue said. "I couldn't say what I wanted to do."

After graduating from UGA, Belue went on to play professional baseball, spending three years in the Montreal Expos organization.

However, after that period of time Belue decided it was time to hang up the glove and return to football. When the United States Football League was formed in 1983, Belue received a chance to put the pads back on and line up under center again.

"The USFL happened in the mid 80's. I was a little disillusioned with my performance in baseball, and I jumped over to the Jacksonville Bulls.

"Just the realization hit me that

I wasn't going to be in the big leagues hitting .265 at A-ball and the AA level. Reality set in and I started looking around. I always wondered about the football level as far as playing goes."

Belue's USFL career didn't last long — because the USFL itself didn't last long, folding in 1985 after three seasons. But though his playing career was over, he made a conscious decision to stay in sports.

Having already done some sports writing and broadcasting, he figured that would be the direction to take his life.

"I didn't have a set plan or goal," Belue said. "I enjoyed doing all three things — writing, radio and TV."

Belue's post-athletic career started on television, where he was a sports anchor in Savannah for five years.

Following that, he was offered the job on 680 in Atlanta.

While he has traveled several roads to get to where he is now, as a drive-time radio host, it all started in one place for him.

Under the lights of Cleveland Field.

BELUE | 11



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Buck Belue looks downfield during Georgia's 26-21 win over Florida in 1980. Belue led the Bulldogs to the national championship that year.

Lastinger led Wildcats, Bulldogs to titles

Former Valdosta, UGA quarterback now a vice president for Smith Barney

BY CHRISTIAN MALONE

The Valdosta Daily Times

VALDOSTA — John Lastinger lived out two dreams of many local kids: He got to play quarterback for the Valdosta Wildcats and the Georgia Bulldogs.

Post-football life has been pretty good to Lastinger, too.

Nowadays, instead of passing footballs to open receivers, he passes financial advice to clients planning for the future. Lastinger is the vice president of investments for Smith Barney in Valdosta.

"This is my 15th year at Smith Barney," he said. "It's a rewarding job to help people with their finances."

Football remains a big passion for Lastinger, as does the financial world. But his biggest passion is his family. Wife Suzanne, 14-year old daughter Lindsay and 12-year old son Jake are his pride and joy.

"I've been real fortunate," Lastinger said. "I can't complain about my life at all. Someone's been looking out for me."

Lastinger quarterbacked Valdosta High to the state championship and a 14-0-1 record in 1978, the first of coach Nick Hyder's seven state championships with

the Wildcats. In 1978, Lastinger passed for 1,193 yards and 10 touchdowns, while running for another 511 yards and 13 touchdowns.

Lastinger also started for the Valdosta baseball team that won the state championship that same year under Butch Brooks.

Then Lastinger led Georgia to the Southeastern Conference title and the national championship game (a 27-23 loss to Penn State) in 1982. That was Vince Dooley's last SEC championship with the Bulldogs. His record in his two years starting for Georgia was a very-impressive 20-2-1.

Like the company he now works for, the football teams Lastinger played for succeeded the old-fashioned way: They earned it.

Both the Wildcats and the Bulldogs of those days won with tough, physical defense and by working about as hard as anyone. Lastinger was coached by two legendary coaches, Hyder and Dooley.

"Coach Hyder and Coach Dooley were very different, but both were very good coaches," Lastinger said. "Coach Hyder was a unique individual who stood for all the right things. He helped our development. He was demanding, but he also tried to teach us a lot of



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Valdosta High football coach Nick Hyder, center, poses with quarterbacks Buck Belue, left, and John Lastinger, right, in the late 1970s. Belue and Lastinger starred at Valdosta, then went on to win Southeastern Conference championships and a national championship at Georgia.



FILE PHOTO

John Lastinger is now a vice president of investments for Smith Barney in Valdosta, where he has worked for 15 years.

life lessons.

"Coach Dooley was also a great coach to play for. He had a great career at Georgia. It was wonderful to play for both of them."

While he was more of a passing quarterback, Lastinger will always have a place in Bulldog lore for his 17-yard touchdown run in the 1984 Cotton Bowl against Texas, which gave No. 7 Georgia a 10-9 victory and denied the No. 2 Longhorns a possible national championship. Texas' defense had shut Georgia down all day, but with three minutes to play, it could not stop Lastinger on a triple option keeper. He took off, and lunged into the end zone before All-American defensive back Jerry Gray of Texas could bring him down.

"It was the play I wanted to run," Lastinger told The Dallas Morning News after the game. "We ran an option away from our receivers. They only had one sup-

port man (Texas cornerback Mossy Cade). If he took Tron (Jackson, the tailback), I'd keep it. If he took me, I'd pitch it. Even though the game wasn't over, I knew we had the momentum and would win."

"It was a good way to go out my senior year," Lastinger says now. "I was fortunate enough to be in that situation, where I could make a play like that to help my team win a bowl game."

A Bulldogs fan has posted video of that touchdown on YouTube, for all the Georgia fans to see.

While that touchdown is arguably Lastinger's best-known play from his UGA days, he has a lot of fond memories of Georgia.

"It was great to be on a team that won a national championship, like we did in 1980," Lastinger said. "I didn't play that year, because Buck Belue was the quarterback, but it was still a big deal to me to be

a part of that team. In 1981 (as a redshirt sophomore), I got to play some, and that was fun. Then I got to start my last two years. Playing with a Heisman Trophy winner like Herschel Walker was a great experience. So was winning an SEC championship in 1982, and playing for a national championship against Penn State. Also, we beat Florida four straight years.

"I had a great time at Georgia, and it wasn't only in football. I made a lot of good friends there. I took more than just memories from Georgia."

Lastinger still follows his alma maters closely.

"I go to the Georgia games in Athens," Lastinger said. "I keep up with the Wildcats, too. They struggled last year, but I don't think their record was indicative of how

Talley led Wildcats to fifth national title

Former Valdosta, University of Georgia quarterback now a local lawyer

BY CHRIS WALSH

The Valdosta Daily Times



SUBMITTED PHOTO

In 1986, Greg Talley was No. 1 for the Valdosta Wildcats, and the Wildcats were No. 1 in the country. Talley passed for 1,723 yards and 19 touchdowns that season, and rushed for another 13 touchdowns.

team) and 13 touchdowns (second on the team).

"I was fortunate for the time I had at Valdosta. We won a lot of games. The thing I remember most was all the games that we won," said Talley.

The 1986 state playoffs were a real lesson in humility for Valdosta's opponents. The Wildcats won each of their final four playoff games by at least 28 points. After a 28-16 win over Tift

County to begin the playoffs, the Wildcats beat Lowndes 28-0, took out Carver 28-0 in the quarterfinals, then pounded Bradwell Institute 49-7 in the semifinals. Valdosta wrapped up its perfect season with a 28-0 victory over longtime playoff nemesis Clarke Central. That earned the Wildcats their 19th state championship, and later they also claimed the USA Today national championship.

After his glory days at Valdosta

High School, Talley went on to play quarterback for the University of Georgia. His father-in-law, Doug McFalls, was Georgia head coach Vince Dooley's second team captain, in 1965. Talley was the Bulldogs' captain in 1991.

"We were in a tough position because we were in a transition period at UGA when I was there. The school was just coming off probation," said Talley. "But you always remember the guys you played with. This past week, I talked to Preston Jones and Kevin Brown."

Talley was the sixth Valdosta quarterback to sign a scholarship to Georgia, and would be the third former Wildcat quarterback to play for the Bulldogs in 1980s. Dale Williams, Glenn Davis, Don Golden, Buck Belue and John Lastinger also put on the red-and-

black after their days in the black-and-gold were over.

Interestingly, for all six, the final game of their Valdosta careers was the state championship game. Like Talley, Williams (1957), Davis (1965), Golden (1969) and Lastinger (1978) walked away with state championships. Belue would quarterback the Bulldogs to the national championship in 1980.

After receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree in communications from Georgia, Talley went on to Mercer to earn his law degree.

Since returning to Valdosta, Talley has continued to give back to the community that has been his home for many years. Presently he serves as the President of the Valdosta Bar Association and is the current chairman of the Pastor-Parish

TALLEY | 11



COLEMAN TALLEY.COM

Greg Talley is an attorney in Valdosta, and the father of two daughters.

Miller joining elite in Coaches Hall of Fame

Former Lowndes coach went 79-39 in 10 years with Vikings, 209-93 overall

BY CHRISTIAN MALONE

The Valdosta Daily Times

VALDOSTA — The Georgia Athletic Coaches Association Hall of Fame contains some of the finest names in state football coaching history.

Names like Wright Bazemore, Nick Hyder, Bill Chappell, Dan Pitts and Billy Henderson are enshrined in the Hall.

Add Milt Miller's name to that list.

Miller, who coached Lowndes High from 1992-2001 and still resides in Lake Park, has been chosen as one of the GACA Hall of

Fame's Class of 2007. He will be enshrined this summer in Dalton.

"That is a tremendous honor," Miller said. "There's some good competition in that Hall."

"This is the ultimate honor for a coach," said Terry Rogers, a past president of the GACA and a long-time friend of Miller's. "I am very happy for Milt to receive this honor."

Miller was both pleased and surprised when he found out.

"I'm not sure I belong there. There's some good coaches in there," he said. "I was real surprised when I got the call. I'm looking forward to going in."

Most Viking fans would tell you he belongs there. Miller won 79 games in 10 seasons at Lowndes — including 63 in his final six years as the head Viking — and coached the 1999 Vikings to the state championship. He also won two region championships and made the playoffs each of his final seven seasons.

Before arriving at Lowndes, Miller coached 15 seasons at Worth County, where he built the Rams into a Class AAA power. Under Miller's guidance, Worth won the 1987 state championship and played for three other state titles.

"I enjoyed my time coaching. I



PAUL LEAVY/THE VALDOSTA DAILY TIMES

Lowndes High coach Milt Miller discusses a play with his players in 2001. Miller went 79-39 in 10 seasons as the Vikings' head coach.

have no regrets," Miller said. "This is a tribute to my players and assistant coaches. I was blessed to work with a great group of guys. I wouldn't have gotten this award if not for them.

"I was fortunate to only work in two places as a head coach. We had some good teams at Lowndes and at Worth County."

Four assistants stayed with Miller for most of his coaching tenure: Ed Parker, Randy Hill, Harold Brantley and William Davis. Hill and Davis are still assistants at Lowndes.

Miller retired after the 2001 season with a 209-93 record, which currently ranks him 41st on the state's all-time wins list. At Lowndes, he went 79-39, which puts him second on the Vikings' all-time wins list. His .669 winning percentage also ranks second.

He remains a popular figure at Lowndes, where the fans and the current coaches respect what he did for the program. He still frequently goes to games at Martin Stadium.

"I enjoy watching Lowndes. I go

to all the games I can, when I'm not on the road," Miller said. "I enjoy being a fan. They've had a lot of success recently (state championships in 2004 and 2005).

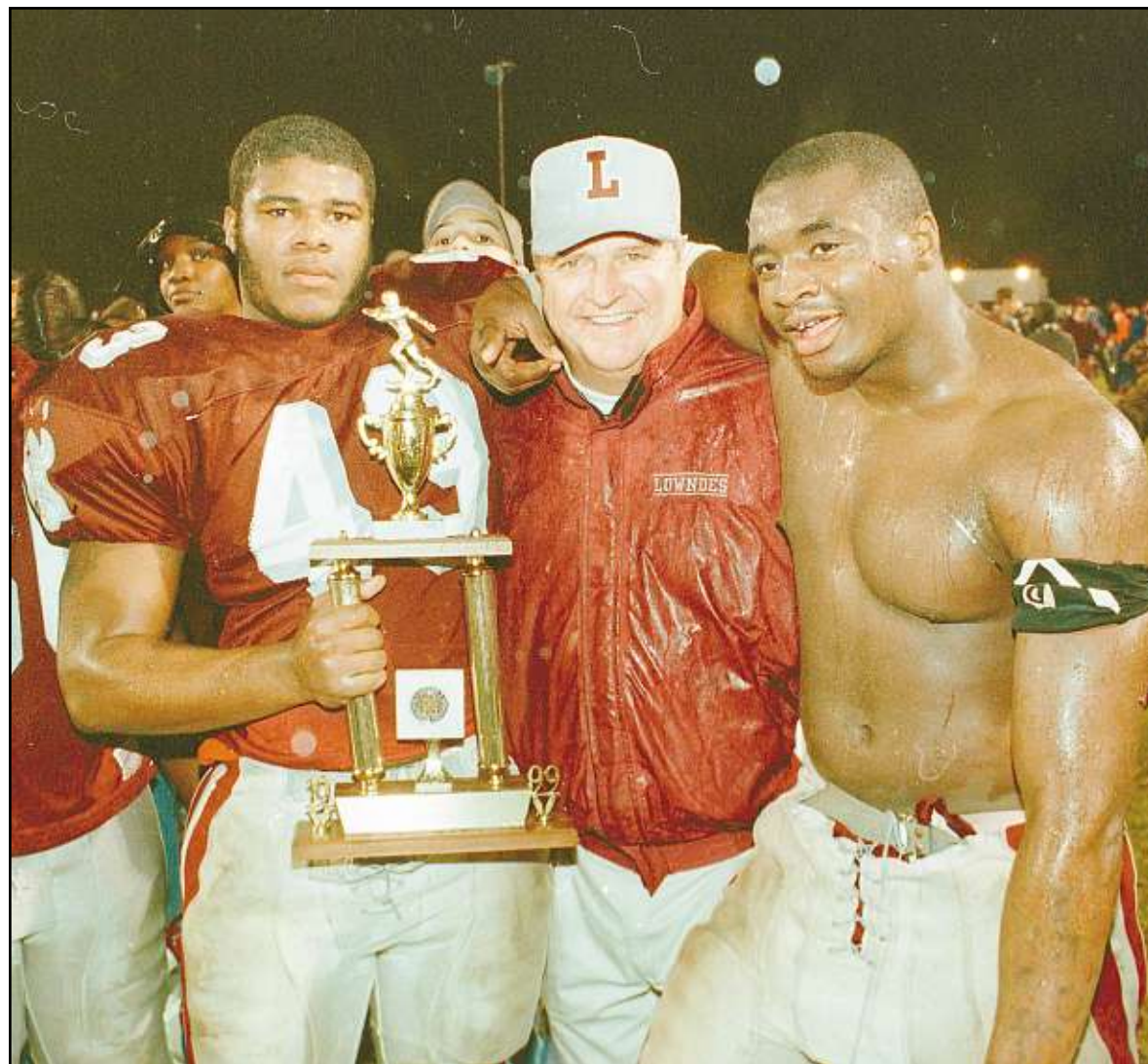
"I loved coaching there. It's a great place to coach. It was a lot of fun. I appreciate all the support I got there."

The state championship remains the best moment of his splendid coaching career.

"That's the highlight of my 25 years in coaching," Miller said. "That was a special year. A lot of good kids on that team. It was fun to see them grow up as the season went on. We had some thoroughbreds, and we just let them go."

Lowndes won only three of its first six games (though two of those wins were by scores of 67-20 and 41-6). But then the Vikings got on a roll, and just kept going. Most of the wins came pretty handily, but Lowndes won a couple of tough ones in the playoffs, edging Southwest DeKalb 28-27 and Warner Robins Northside 31-28 in

MILLER | 11



FILE PHOTO

Former Lowndes High football coach Milt Miller, center, celebrates with defensive linemen Vernon Wright, left, and Vincent Burns after the Vikings won the 1999 Class AAAA state championship over Brunswick.

Carter, Lady Rebels chasing SEC golf elite

Former Valdosta High star was Mississippi's top golfer in the fall

BY CHRISTIAN MALONE

The Valdosta Daily Times

VALDOSTA — Dori Carter's favorite quote is: "I'm going to a special place when I die, but I want to make sure my life is special while I'm here."

Her golf life has been pretty special so far.

Carter, a former Valdosta High star, is a sophomore on the golf team at the University of Mississippi, and will try to lead the Rebels into the upper echelon of the Southeastern Conference this season.

Her spring season got started on a real good note. Carter finished second at the FSU/Chrysler Challenge in Destin, Fla. on Feb. 25-26. Carter shot rounds of 75, 74 and 73 for a three-round total of 222.

"Dori played extremely well against one of the top players in the country (winner Caroline Westrup of Florida State)," Ole Miss head coach Meghan Bolger told olemisssports.com. "She played extremely well, and it was important for us that she finished the way she did. Her second-place finish secured us the fourth spot."

The second-place finish was Carter's best in her college career, and it continued what has been a good season for her.

In the fall, Carter was Ole Miss' best golfer. Her average score for an 18-hole round was 76.28, more than a stroke better than any of her teammates. The Lady Rebels played in five tournaments, and she was their top finisher in three of them.

Her best performance of the fall was a tie for seventh with a 218 at the Jeannine McHaney Intercollegiate in Lubbock, Texas. She also took 14th at the Auburn Derby Invitational and 19th at the Lady Paladin Invitational.

Carter may be only 20 years old, but she has already gotten to do a lot more than most 20-year old athletes.

In high school, she won the Region 1-AAAAA championship four times, and none of those victories were even close. Her junior year, she blew away the field at the



FILE PHOTO

Dori Carter won four Region 1-AAAAA championships during her Valdosta High career. She was state runner-up in 2005 and took third in the state tournament in 2004.

region tournament, winning by an inconceivable 21 strokes at Valdosta Country Club, her home course. She finished second at the state tournament as a senior and third as a junior.

On the amateur circuit, she played in several of the south's top amateur tournaments. She won Southeastern Junior Golf Tour events in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla. (The TPC Classic, played at The TPC at Sawgrass, site of one of the

PGA Tour's top non-major events) and Milton, Fla. (The Moors Classic). She also competed in the U.S. Women's Amateur. Last summer, she played in the North-South Women's Amateur on one of the country's best-known courses, Pinehurst No. 2 in North Carolina, shot the 10th best score in the preliminary round and made it to the second round of match play.

And she played in the premier tournament in women's golf.



OLEMISSSPORTS.COM

Dori Carter was Mississippi's top golfer this fall, averaging a 76.28.

Less than a month after graduating from Valdosta High in June 2005, Carter won a sectional qualifier in Spartanburg, S.C. and qualified to play in the United States Women's Open at Cherry Hills Country Club, outside of Denver. She shot an 85 in the first round of the Open, but came back to shoot a 76 — better than many established LPGA players, including Hall of Famers Laura Davies and Beth Daniel — in round 2. Her two-round score of 161 was better than nine pros, including Davies.

As a freshman at Ole Miss last season, she finished 51st in the Southeastern Conference tourna-

ment, but shot a 73 in the final round, one of the best rounds that day, and had one of only five eagles in the entire tournament. In her second tournament as a Lady Rebel, she shot a 69 in the final round of the UA/Ann Rhoads Intercollegiate in Tuscaloosa, Ala., and finished tied for seventh with a 223. That was the best individual finish by a Lady Rebel in 2005-06. She also tied for eighth at the SEC/ACC Challenge in Destin, Fla.

Off the course, Carter is a business major, and made the U.M.A.A. Honor Roll last spring. She was an honor graduate at Valdosta.

Marcus Avant a basketball star in England

Former All-State forward helping Worthing chase repeat championship

BY CHRISTIAN MALONE

The Valdosta Daily Times



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Marcus Avant helped Central Florida win back-to-back Conference USA championships. UCF made the NCAA tournament both seasons.

2005), and I'm playing like I was before the injury."

At Valdosta, Avant was a big-time scorer, and arguably one of the best players the Wildcats have had in their basketball-playing history. His senior year, he averaged 25.1 points, 12.2 rebounds, 4.4 assists and 3.2 steals, and led Valdosta to the Region 1-AAAAA championship. He was a first-team All-State selection. Avant was also a second-team All-State player his junior year. He was a three-time first-team All-Region selection, and the Wildcats won three region

championships while he was playing. They also went 25-0 in the 1997-98 regular season and were state runners-up in 1998-99.

Valdosta coach John Miller always insisted his players play strong defense, and those defensive lessons would serve Avant well down the road.

After high school, Avant played one season at Southeastern Illinois and another at Northwest Mississippi Junior College. At Northwest Mississippi, he led the team in scoring (12.4 points) and was second in rebounding. His

play that season earned him a scholarship to Central Florida.

In his two seasons at Central Florida, he put up solid offensive numbers, averaging 10.1 points a game and helping the Knights win consecutive Conference USA titles. His senior year, he averaged 13.2 points.

But it was his defense that Central Florida really loved. He was the Knights' starting small forward as much because of his defense as his offense, and UCF often had him guard the other team's best player. As a senior in 2004-05, Avant was selected the Conference USA Defensive Player of the Year. He got to play in the NCAA tournament both seasons he was at UCF.

After graduating from UCF, and rehabilitating a torn anterior cruciate ligament, Avant headed to Turkey to play for Selcuk Universitesi Konya in 2005, then

came back to the U.S. and played for the Pennsylvania Valleydogs of the United States Basketball League. Then late last year, he got the chance to go to England, and Worthing has dominated ever since he got there.

Over in England, Avant still tries to keep up with his alma maters, UCF and VHS. During his phone conversation with The Valdosta Daily Times, his first question was: "How did Valdosta do this year?"

After the season, Avant plans to return to the U.S. and play in the Orlando Magic's summer league. Even when his playing career ends one day, he still doesn't plan to leave basketball behind.

"I want to be a basketball coach someday. I would love to one day be a coach at Valdosta," Avant said.

If he does indeed become a basketball coach, he'll have a world of experience to draw from.

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Barber was a two-sport winner at Clinch

Homerville native won six state championships in baseball, four in football

BY CHRISTIAN MALONE

The Valdosta Daily Times

HOMERVILLE — The name fits perfectly on Clinch County's baseball field: Cecil Barber Field.

Last April, Clinch County High School renamed its baseball field after Cecil Barber, its longtime baseball coach. It was a way to honor the man who remains an icon in the small 6,000-resident county, and probably will for many years to come.

"That meant a lot to me," Barber said. "I was not expecting it. It's a pretty nice honor to have a field named after me."

Barber was both surprised and honored when they named the field after him, but with all he did for the program, it was only fitting.

It was Barber who restarted the Clinch baseball program in 1979. It was Barber who put in countless hours towards establishing a competitive baseball program. It was Barber who built the program into a perennial state powerhouse, as good as any in Class A. It was Barber who coached nearly three decades worth of Clinch County baseball players, some of them

longer than just four years of high school ball.

It was Cecil Barber who coached the Panthers to six state baseball championships, more than any other school in Georgia.

Barber gave more to his alma mater than it could ever give back to him. Putting his name on the field was a fitting tribute.

Barber hung up his cap and his No. 34 baseball jersey in 2003, after leading Clinch to its sixth state championship. That team was one of his most special, in part because its star player was his son, Rhett, a left-handed pitcher and first baseman. Rhett Barber was the Class A State Player of the Year that season.

But the veteran coach still hasn't totally left the program. He still has a locker in the team's locker room, and current baseball coach Trent Hatton has extended him an open invitation to be a part of the team whenever he wants to. Occasionally, he returns to his field to work with the players.

Cecil Barber was born and raised in Homerville, the son of the county's longtime sheriff. He played for Clinch County High,

then played baseball at Valdosta State for the legendary Tommy Thomas, who has also coached several of his former players (the Blazers' leading hitter right now is former Panther Rance Morgan). After earning his degree from VSU, he came back to his alma mater, where he taught for 29 years.

He also coached football at Clinch for 29 years, the last 10 as the head coach. Under his watch, Clinch's football team won the 2002 state championship, going 15-0 with a team that some feel was the school's best ever, and he compiled a 91-29 record as head coach. Before becoming head coach, he was the defensive coordinator for 19 years, where he helped Clinch win three more state championships under the late Donald Tison. Under his watch, the Panthers earned a reputation for playing some of the toughest, most dominant defensive football in Class A (the 2004 Panthers set a national record by allowing only 117 rushing yards all season).

Clinch made it to the state semifinals, played in Atlanta's Georgia Dome, in each of Barber's final



CLINCH COUNTY NEWS

Cecil Barber was also a successful football coach, going 91-29 in 10 years as Clinch's head coach. His 2002 team went 15-0, won the state championship, and is the only undefeated team in Panthers' history.

three seasons as head coach. The Panthers won 28 of Barber's final 30 games on the sidelines. He also played a major role in developing the Clinch team that would add another state championship in 2004.

Barber also served as Clinch's athletic director for several years. Being the baseball coach, the football coach, the athletic director and teaching a full load of classes made him one of the busiest people on the Clinch County campus.

Barber finished out his coaching career with a one-year stint as the football coach at Jeff Davis in 2004, then with his 30 years of teaching in (qualifying him for a state retirement pension), he retired to Homerville. Sort of — he's now an assistant principal at Clinch County Elementary School, officially working part time, but really staying the entire day.

Barber also still helps out Clinch's baseball and football teams on occasion. He mentored the men that succeeded him as the Panthers' head coaches, football coach Jim Dickerson and Hatton, and when he left those programs, he recommended both of them to be his successors.

"I still help out the baseball team a little, working with the hitters. I enjoy it," Barber said. "I talk a lot with Coach Dickerson about football. I coached him when he played at Clinch (in the early 1980s), and then he was my assistant for 10 years, after a few years under Coach Tison."

On Jan. 21, 2006, Barber was inducted into the Georgia Dugout Club Hall of Fame in Atlanta. He was one of only 27 baseball coaches in the state to be in the Hall. One



CLINCH COUNTY NEWS

In April 2006, Clinch County High School named its baseball field after longtime head coach Cecil Barber. In 29 seasons as the Panthers' head coach, Barber won six Class A state championships.

Dawson among Seminoles, Roughriders' best

Valdosta native inducted into Florida State, Saskatchewan Halls of Fame

BY CHRISTIAN MALONE

The Valdosta Daily Times

Rhett Dawson was an excellent wide receiver.

Just ask Florida State and the Saskatchewan Roughriders. Both inducted him into their respective Halls of Fame last year.

Or even ask the President of the United States, who remembered Dawson nearly 30 years after seeing him play for Valdosta High.

Dawson was an All-American wide receiver for Valdosta High School who went on to become an All-American receiver for Florida State, played on a Super Bowl team for the Minnesota Vikings, and later was an all-pro in the Canadian Football League.

"I've been blessed," Dawson said from his home in Austin, Texas. "To play football for the teams I played for, and the coaches I was fortunate to play for, and now to have success in my business, live in a city I love, have two good kids, and two siblings and a mother I still get to see, I am truly blessed."

On Sept. 8, 2006, Dawson was inducted into the Florida State Athletic Hall of Fame. He is enshrined with the greatest athletes in Seminoles history, like Charlie Ward, Deion Sanders, Derrick Brooks, Fred Biletnikoff, Burt Reynolds, and fellow Lowndes County native J.D. Drew.

"It was a great honor," Dawson said. "It was real special going back there last year and getting that. I was touched by how many of my teammates showed up for it. It's just an incredible honor."

Making the honor even more special was one particular FSU Hall of Famer in attendance: older brother William "Red" Dawson. Rhett and Red Dawson are the only brothers in the FSU Hall of Fame.

"That was real special having Red there, just as it was special to be there in 1993 when he went in," Dawson said. "I couldn't have asked for a better older brother than Red. He spent hours with me working on football."

Two weeks later, Dawson was inducted into the Saskatchewan Roughriders' Plaza of Honor.

"That meant a lot to me," Dawson said. "I enjoyed playing



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Rhett Dawson was an All-American wide receiver for Valdosta High and the Florida State Seminoles. In 2006, he was inducted into the FSU Hall of Fame and the Saskatchewan Roughriders' Plaza of Honor.

for the Roughriders. I had a good time up there."

To be honored by two different teams made it a great month.

"It was incredibly thrilling. I am honored by both of them," Dawson said. "Coach (Bobby) Bowden, who I had known since I was 14, when he was an assistant at Florida State and I used to hang around the locker room because I was Red's brother, called me and said, 'Rhett, I want to be the first to congratulate you on making the Florida State Hall of Fame.' That was real special to get the call from him. Then five days later, I was driving on the Interstate here in Austin and I get a call from Saskatchewan, and I'm thinking, 'Who could that be? I haven't talked to anybody from there in years.' And it was the Roughriders, telling me they were putting me in (the Plaza of Honor)."

Rhett Dawson grew up in Valdosta and starred at Valdosta High School. He was an All-State

wide receiver as both a junior and a senior, and a second-team prep All-American as a senior, and helped lead the Wildcats to the 1965 and 1966 state championships.

"I am very grateful to have grown up under the Valdosta Wildcat tradition," Dawson said. "It really is special. From 1960-1971, Valdosta won eight state championships... We expected to win, because it had been done for so long. We felt like we were supposed to continue the winning tradition."

"I played with two good quarterbacks in Glenn Davis (1965) and John Smrcina (1966). We ran what you'd now call a pro set offense, and I got a lot of balls thrown to me in that offense."

Dawson impressed a lot of people who saw him play. That included a young man stationed at Moody Air Force Base named George W. Bush.

"A few years ago, I went to a fundraiser for George W. Bush,

back when he was governor of Texas," Dawson recalled. "When I met him, (I introduced myself) and he says, 'Rhett Dawson. I know you from somewhere,' and I say, 'Sir, we've never met,' and he goes, 'No, I know you from somewhere.' My friend tells him that I played football, and then Bush goes, 'That's it! You played for the Valdosta Wildcats! When I was stationed at Moody Air Force Base, I used to go watch Valdosta play on Friday nights. I remember you. You were pretty good.'"

Good enough to remember 30 years — and many steps up the political ladder — later.

Like most players from that era, Dawson has fond memories of playing for the Wildcats and for the legendary Wright Bazemore.

"To play for Coach Bazemore was real special," Dawson said. "Coach Bazemore taught us a lot about football, and about how to be a man. He was tough, but he was a real legend. It was an honor to play for him. I still remember many of the things he taught me, so he is still coaching me today."

Dawson was heavily recruited by top college programs across the country. Florida State head coach Bill Peterson convinced him to play for the Seminoles, where his older brother, Red, had been a star.

"It probably helped that Red had played at Florida State, and everything was so familiar to me,"

Dawson said. "But the real reason I decided to go to Florida State is because they had adopted the San Diego Chargers' offense. The Chargers had the most progressive passing attack in pro football, with John Hadl and Lance Alworth, and Coach Peterson was running their offense. I wanted to be a receiver. I wanted to catch a lot of passes."

As a junior in 1970, Dawson led the Seminoles with 54 catches for 946 yards and five touchdowns. He averaged 17.5 yards per catch.

Dawson followed his outstanding junior season by being named third team All-America as a senior in 1971. He caught 62 passes for 817 yards and seven touchdowns. His best game was a 161-yard effort against Virginia Tech. Then in the inaugural Fiesta Bowl, against Arizona State, he scored three touchdowns and a two-point conversion, setting a Fiesta Bowl scoring record that stood for 32 years.

Dawson's name is still prominent in FSU's record book 35 years later. He ranks 10th in career receiving yards (1,915) and fifth in catches per game. He also had seven 100-yard receiving games.

Then he played for both the Houston Oilers and the Minnesota Vikings in the NFL. The Vikings went to the Super Bowl the year Dawson played for them.

"That was a great year,"

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

Rhett Dawson, left, and his brother, Red Dawson, right, pose with a fan at a Florida State Athletic Hall of Fame function. Rhett and Red Dawson are the only brothers to be enshrined in the FSU Hall of Fame.

Coats trying to stick on Chicago Cubs' roster

Former Valdosta High star one of school's two major leaguers

BY CHRISTIAN MALONE

The Valdosta Daily Times

VALDOSTA — Buck Coats has gotten a taste of major league life. Now he wants to get there permanently.

Coats, a 2000 Valdosta High graduate, is in Spring Training with the Chicago Cubs right now in Mesa, Arizona. He is battling to make the Cubs' opening day roster.

"I worked the last month (before Spring Training), getting ready," Coats said. "You never can tell. You've just got to go out there and play the way you've always played. Do things right, hustle and you never know what will happen. You might make it or you might not, but anything can happen in baseball."

For the 20 or so players with all-but-guaranteed roster spots, Spring Training is a time for getting in shape and preparing for the season. But for the other 20 or so players working with the big league club, it's a different story. Those 5-6 weeks are their auditions, their battles to show the big club that they belong in the major leagues.

Buck Coats finds himself one of those players fighting for a spot with a big league club.

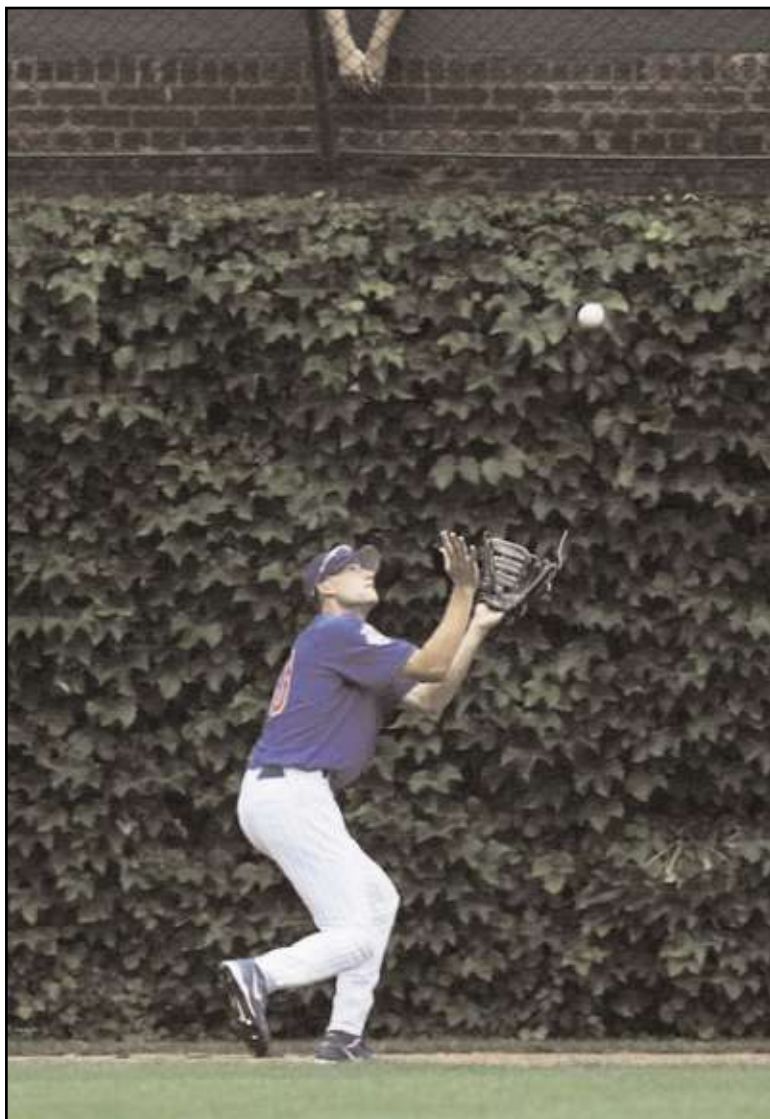
"It's a dogfight," Coats said. "I'm going to give it 100 percent, and if it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out. It's not the end of the world. But if it does, I'll be grateful and I'm going to give it all I've got and do my best."

Coats' versatility will be an asset in his fight to make the majors. He can play all three outfield positions, as well as first, second or third base. Being a left-handed hitter is also an asset, because teams always like to have lefties on their bench.

"I play outfield, infield, anywhere I can fit in and stay in the lineup," Coats said.

It has been a long road to the majors for Buck Coats. Drafted in the 18th round out of high school by the Cubs in 2000, Coats has spent the last seven seasons in the Cubs' organization.

He has played at every level of professional baseball, from rookie league to the major leagues. He has



VALDOSTABASEBALL.COM

Buck Coats of the Chicago Cubs catches the final out of a game against the Philadelphia Phillies last August at Chicago's Wrigley Field. Coats played 18 games for the Cubs in 2006.

worn the uniform of teams in Mesa, Lansing, Mich., Daytona Beach, Fla., Jackson, Tenn., Des Moines, Iowa, and most notably, the blue pinstripes of the Chicago Cubs.

"It's been a hard road, but I made it," Coats said. "I started out at the lowest level, and worked my way up through each level, and finally got my foot in the door last year. It turned out all right.

"Every day I put in was worth it. Every night I stayed after and hit, all the ground balls and fly balls I took. That one day when you

step on that field and you realize, 'Here I am. I made it,' all that it took to get there has paid off."

Coats was a minor league All-Star in 2003 with the Lansing Lugnuts and in 2005 with the West Tennessee Diamond Jaxx. His best season, though, was probably 2004 with the Daytona Cubs, when he batted .290 and hit a career-best eight home runs.

The low minors are filled with guys who last just one or two years, then get released. Coats understands that, and doesn't take the Cubs' patience with him for

granted.

"I'm very grateful to the Cubs' organization. They've been real good to me," Coats said. "I think it's great that I've been with the Cubs for so long. Not a lot of guys get a chance to stay with one organization this long, but I've had the chance. I hope to make it with them and stay there.

"I want to be on that team when they win the World Series."

All that time spent in the minors, and all that work Coats has put in for seven years, paid off last August, when Iowa manager Mike Quade called him to tell him he was being called up to the majors to join the Cubs. It was a dream come true.

"To be able to play for the Cubs, and to play at Wrigley Field, is just amazing. That park has so much history, and I'm so proud to be able to say I played there for the Cubs," Coats said. "That's got to be one of the greatest places to play ever. The fans are great. It's an old field, and they haven't changed it much. You walk on that field, and you realize some of the people that have been on that field. That is awesome."

"He's a young man I liked in Spring Training," then-manager Dusty Baker told chicagocubs.com after Coats' promotion. "He has a great attitude, works hard. He's got a pretty good arm in the outfield. He'll fit in whenever and where we

need him."

Not long after he arrived in Chicago, Coats got his first major league hit off of Los Angeles Dodgers ace Derek Lowe at Wrigley Field. A few games later, he stepped up to the plate to lead off the eighth inning in Cincinnati, and launched his first major league home run off Aaron Harang of the Reds, a homer that gave the Cubs a 2-1 lead.

"It was unbelievable," Coats said. "I will never forget that the rest of my life. I sprinted around the bases as fast as I could. I got in the dugout, and everybody's high-fiving me. You never forget that stuff. I've got the ball, and the one from my first hit."

Coats had the opportunity to face several of the National League's best pitchers, including All-Stars like Greg Maddux and Lowe.

"I never thought I'd get to face someone like Greg Maddux," he said. "He's tough, because his ball moves so much. (Cubs teammate) Carlos Zambrano is nasty. So is Derek Lowe.

"Bronson Arroyo (of the Reds) was the toughest for me. He doesn't throw the hardest, but he's so deceptive and he mixes up his pitches. I had a hard time facing him."

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VALDOSTABASEBALL.COM

Buck Coats of the Chicago Cubs, a former Valdosta High player, poses with Valdosta baseball coach Bart Shuman last year.

Belue

Continued from page 2B

It started while watching Wright Bazemore walk the sidelines, as Belue sat in the stands and dreamed of playing there one day, and extended to Hyder challenging the freshman quarterback to do better. It also included following his brothers, Guy and Blake, in their Wildcat careers.

“Having grown up in Valdosta gave me such a solid base,” Belue said. “Having the opportunity of growing up in Valdosta was such a great opportunity for a young kid like myself.”

That road then took him to a National Championship at Georgia, a short baseball career and a stint in the USFL. Now it has led to broadcasting.

“It was a nice road,” Belue said. “I don’t have too many regrets looking back.”

Lastinger

Continued from page 3B

well they played. They were in every game.”

When asked how well he would play in today’s Southeastern Conference, Lastinger replies he’s not sure, out of respect for the quality of today’s game. In his day, though, he was good enough to go 20-2-1 as Georgia’s starting quarterback.

He also admits that SEC football has changed since he played. The SEC of the early 1980’s emphasized defense and the running game. Today, Mark Richt is the coach, and the Bulldogs feature a wide-open aerial attack that is predicated primarily on the pass.

“If you watch Georgia play today, it’s much different than when I played,” Lastinger said. “They throw the ball a lot more than we ever did when I was there. But Coach Richt is doing what he has to do to win. Back then, Coach Dooley did what he felt we needed to do to win. Back then, you ran the ball a lot on offense. Alabama won a national championship running the wishbone (in 1978 under the great Paul “Bear” Bryant), and we won one running with Herschel out of the I.”

Lastinger is a member of the Board of Trustees at Valwood School and is involved with the Valdosta Boys and Girls Club.

“I’ve been very fortunate, and I’ve tried to give back,” Lastinger said. “I’m involved with the Boys and Girls Club, because that’s the future of our community. My parents taught me that there were a lot of people who gave when I was growing up, and that I ought to do the same. The Boys and Girls Club has touched a lot of lives. I wish everybody could see what goes on down there at Toombs Street, and how important it is to those kids’ lives. It is a great organization.”

For all he knows, one of those kids at the Boys Club could be a future quarterback for the Valdosta Wildcats and the Georgia Bulldogs. Just like John Lastinger.

Talley

Continued from page 4B

Relations Committee at the Park Avenue Methodist Church.

Talley has also served as the President of the Valdosta Lawyers’ Club and as a Chairman for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

Talley’s coach at Valdosta, Nick Hyder, was not just interested in building winners on the football field. The Hall of Fame coach also wanted to develop his players into solid young men who would become successful in life and be positive members of their communities.

Greg Talley has done exactly that.

Dawson

Continued from page 9B

Dawson said. “I loved playing for (Vikings coach) Bud Grant. He was cut from the same mold as Coach Bazemore. He knew football, and you just really respected him. The Vikings had Fran Tarkenton at quarterback, and the Purple People Eaters defense, with Alan Page, Jim Marshall and Carl Eller.

“We won the NFC championship and went to the Super Bowl. We lost to the Dolphins, who, in my mind, had one of the greatest teams ever. This was the year after they went 17-0, and they were a great team.”

Then Dawson headed north, and had two all-pro seasons with the Saskatchewan Roughriders of the Canadian Football League.

“I had a phenomenal time playing for Saskatchewan,” Dawson said. “Our quarterback was Ronnie Lancaster, and I will put his numbers next to anyone’s. He and I hit it off right away.”

Lancaster and Dawson were as good as any quarterback-receiver duo in the CFL in those days. Lancaster, a CFL Hall of Famer, threw for 50,535 yards and had 333 touchdown passes in his career. In 1976, with Dawson as his primary receiver, Lancaster was the CFL’s MVP.

In 1975 and 1976, Dawson was an all-CFL receiver. In 1976, he helped the Roughriders post the CFL’s best record (11-5) and make it to the Grey Cup (the CFL’s version of the Super Bowl), where they lost a heartbreaker, 23-20 to Ottawa, on a touchdown in the final seconds.

Dawson left the CFL in 1977 and went into business in Houston. He now lives in Austin, where he has owned a land development company for the past 20 years.

“I’ve done well in this business,” Dawson said. “I love living in Austin.”

Dawson is the father of two grown children, son Brandon and daughter Alison. He remains close to his brother Red in West Virginia and his sister, Lucille Sineath (an All-State basketball forward at Valdosta in 1963), and his mother, Lucille White, in Valdosta.

“I see them all whenever I can,” Dawson said.

He has stayed in good shape, in part from all the bicycling he does. In 2000, Dawson won the Texas state mountain biking championship in his age group.

In December, he accompanied his brother to the premier of the movie “We Are Marshall” in Huntington, W. Va. Red Dawson was an assistant coach at Marshall from 1968-71, and is one of the movie’s main characters.

“That was such a thrill,” he said. “It was a beautiful movie. I got to know (actor) Matthew Fox, and he is a prince of a guy, and he did a great job playing Red.”

Barber

Continued from page 8B

of the coaches that went into the Hall with him on that day was his college coach, Thomas.

“That was real nice to go into the Hall of Fame with him,” Barber said. “Coach Thomas taught me a lot about the game of baseball. There’s not a nicer guy on the face of the earth than Coach Thomas.”

Barber lives in Homerville with wife Debbie and his three children, Rhett, Brittnee and Brooke.

“God’s been good to me,” Barber said. “I’m happy. My family’s happy.”

Barber still is a fixture at Clinch baseball and football games. He attends all of the football games, and most of the home baseball games.

Coats

Continued from page 10B

Though he has traveled all over the country in his baseball career, including Wrigley Field, Buck Coats has maintained his Valdosta roots. He still returns to his hometown whenever he can, and still hangs out with his old friends.

“I come back here (to Valdosta) for about a month and a half or two months each year,” Coats said. “My friends here are all behind me 100 percent. They all wish me luck and hope I do well. It’s awesome to see how many people support me back here.”

He also found his soulmate back home. On Jan. 20, Coats married a Valdosta girl, April Golden.

Buck Coats is one of only two Valdosta High graduates to make it to the major leagues. The other was Ellis Clary, an infielder who played for the Washington Senators and St. Louis Browns from 1942-45, batting .263.

“I’m proud I went to Valdosta, and played here. I’m proud that people are able to say that I went to Valdosta and made it,” Coats said. “There have been some good ballplayers come out of Valdosta.”

Coats understands that baseball won’t last forever, that it could end anytime. But he’s enjoyed this ride while it has lasted, and hopes to make it last as long as he possibly can.

“I love it. I wouldn’t want to do anything else,” he said.

Miller

Continued from page 5B

one of the most famous games in Vikings history. That night in the Georgia Dome, Lowndes fell behind 28-3 in the second quarter, but rallied to win 31-28.

“That was a great game to coach in,” Miller said. “I felt good about our chances, even at the half (trailing 28-10). It was a good victory.”

The next week, the Vikings shut out Brunswick 17-0 and claimed their second state championship.

“The last four games of that season, we beat an undefeated team,” Miller said. “Lovejoy was 11-0, Southwest DeKalb was 12-0, Northside was 13-0 and Brunswick was 14-0. And we beat all of them to win the state championship. We had to win all of our games on the road, too, except the state championship.”

That state championship earned Miller state Coach of the Year honors from both the Georgia Sports Writers Association and the Atlanta Touchdown Club.

Miller was born and raised in Seneca, Ky. and played football at Virginia Tech for coach Jerry Claiborne. He has been married to his wife Donna for 35 years, has two children, Traci and Matt, and will soon welcome his second grandchild.

Nowadays, instead of providing other coaches with losses, Miller provides them with pads and helmets. He is a football equipment salesman, covering Georgia, Florida, Alabama and South Carolina.

“I enjoy it. I get to do a lot of travel and see a lot of places,” he said. “This is the busy season right now. All of these coaches are having their clinics, so I’ve got to go up there and try to sell them some equipment. I’ve already been to 14 clinics this year, and I’ve still got eight to go to by May.”

He admits he misses coaching on those Friday nights, but also adds that he doesn’t miss all the work he had to do Saturday through Thursday to get ready for Friday.

Entering the Hall with Miller are Arthur Mott (football), J.B. Beardson (basketball), Harry Ward (track), Hugh Buchanan (baseball) and Charlie Horne (baseball).

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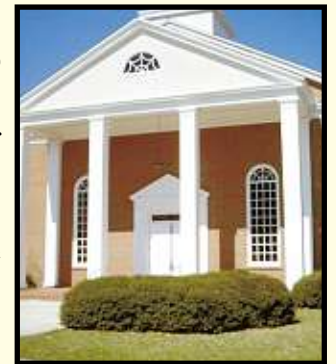
The Police Chief and Staff provide Public Safety for our citizens.

Council Members:

Dr. Walter K. Sandlin, Mayor; Ronald Carter, Mayor Pro-Tem;
Ann Peterson, City Clerk; Jesse E. Fender, Council;
Bert Rutland, Chief of Police; Paul Mulkey, Council;
Robert Plumb, City Attorney; Eric Schindler, Council

The City of Lake Park, GA., was established in 1890 and has its roots deep in the "Old South" when cotton was king.

Lake Park offers a fine quality of life for its residents with a small town atmosphere. Surrounded by several beautiful lakes, boating & fishing can be enjoyed in the community.



"A PLACE OF WORSHIP"

Built in the 1920s, Lake Park Elementary allows the children in the community to learn and develop through education.

Eight churches in the city give the community a place of family worship.



LAKE PARK ELEMENTARY

The Lake Park Area Historical Society grew out of the 1990 Lake Park Centennial and was chartered early in 1991.

Public Safety is ensured with Lake Park's Police Department and the Volunteer Fire Department. The Post Office offers the city of Lake Park convenient and efficient service.

The warm and friendly people of Lake Park are always eager to welcome visitors and newcomers to their community.

Mayor Keith Sandlin, along with City Clerk, Ann Peterson and Council Member J. E. Fender, discussing the city's progress



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