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**Sports****Love of fans, charity bring Dogs home**

Memories, stories warm the hearts of the Bulldog nation

By ALEX BYINGTON

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They come to Athens and spend four years — sometimes less, sometimes more — learning a job that takes some of them to the top of their profession. And when their time in Athens is done, they go to Oakland and Miami, Tampa Bay and Denver, and show off what they learned during their Saturdays at Sanford Stadium.

But no matter how far they travel from the University, Georgia and their faithful fans always stay with them.

“The thing about Georgia is it doesn’t matter where you go, it doesn’t matter who you are, (the Georgia fans) are always gonna show you love. That’s why this is a family — God’s country, baby,” former football Jermaine Phillips said.

On July 15, 1,500 Georgia fans flocked to the Woodruff practice fields, braving torrential rain, just to get a chance to chat with their heroes. The “Countdown to Kickoff” charity event — organized by former Bulldogs Matt and Jon Stinchcomb, Charles Grant and Phillips — had the feeling of a traditional family reunion, with many old and young members of the Bulldog family coming together for a lot of storytelling and reminiscing of good times past.

“It seems like everyone here has got a good story to tell, and that’s the part I really enjoy,” said legendary Bulldog quarterback Buck Belue.

“The people are the passion, and the memories don’t ever fade. I just feel fortunate and blessed that they remember me in a positive light,” Belue said, as he cradled his baby daughter in his hands.

Belue will be forever immortalized in Georgia lore as the quarterback that threw the side-winder 93-yard touchdown pass to receiver Lindsay Scott with 1:04 left in the game against Florida, as the Bulldogs’ 1980 season hung in the balance. That play propelled Georgia to the top ranking in the country and their last national championship.

“If you play for Georgia, you’re not a ‘Former Bulldog’ — you’re a ‘Lifetime Bulldog’,” Jon Stinchcomb said about the brotherhood created by all Georgia faithful. “They’ll each have their own Georgia experience, and that’s what this is about. This is just one big family, and we’re proud to be a part of it.”

With all the memories that flood the minds of the Georgia fans, the memories for the former athletes are just as vivid.



**Doug Penning, who has Down Syndrome, poses in the NFL jersey given to him by his former student-buddy, Jermaine Phillips (No. 23). (ANDY McFEE | The Red & Black)**



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"It's fun. A lady showed me a picture she took of me when I was a freshman," tailback Garrison Hearst said. "The most supportive team is the Bulldogs. You don't see fans like this anywhere."

"Matt was telling me that he wanted to do something, and I was like, 'Anything you need, anything you want, let me know.' Because one of the programs that he was raising money for is one I was actually a part of when I was here at the University of Georgia," said Phillips.



**The Countdown to Kickoff raised approximately \$100,000 and drew over 1,500 fans and 50 current and former Bulldog players. (ANDY McFEE | The Red & Black)**

"I was telling him a story that I still remember a kid now — Doug (Penning) — I remember us going together and doing different stuff. The funny thing is, Matt ran into Doug, not even knowing (who he was), and the first thing Doug came up to him and said, 'Hey, did you play with Jermaine?' It's been six or seven years, and Doug still remembers me," Phillips said. "It's something that is affecting both parties."

"It wasn't like, 'Hey! Oh, you play for Tampa?!'," Matt Stinchcomb said with a laugh.

"I've known Jermaine since I was a little kid. I like him, he's the best — he's the best pal around," Doug Penning, now 18, said as he gave Phillips a big hug. Penning, who has Down Syndrome, has been in the University's Pediatric Exercise and Motor Development Clinic since he was two years old.

The PEMDC is a clinic put on by Michael Horvat of the College of Education. Phillips worked as a buddy for kids like Penning while he was a student-athlete at the University.

"You are having fun with them, but at the same time you are challenging them, letting them know that they can achieve whatever it is they want to achieve," Phillips said.

"He thought he was just going there to play and have fun. But they are working on skills that he needed to build to move on to the next step (in his development)," said Penning's mother Joann.

"He just loves sports, and to have a whole hour with a buddy — one on one — to play basketball, racquetball, throw a football, and then they go swimming every time," she said with a smile.

"There is something very real, very compelling about that. And the fact that no one knows about that clinic blows my mind," Stinchcomb said.

Along with the PEMDC, the Georgia Transplant Foundation and Children's Healthcare of Atlanta helped create a trifecta of worthy charitable causes to which each and every athlete and fan alike helped contribute.

"The Children's Hospital is something we're really passionate about," Belue said. "It's easy to touch people's hearts when it comes to the children, and it's nice to see they're taking care of that first and foremost."

"These are caring people, these are people who are very cognizant of their opportunities as athletes and the impact they can have in their




**Peter Andersen, a seven-year-old from Dalton, despite his muscular dystrophy participates in Charles Grant's Mini Camp drills. "I'm a real Georgia fan," Andersen said. "(But) in kindergarten, I used to not like Georgia, then my mom bought me a**


respective communities,” Stinchcomb said about the 50-plus former and current Bulldogs that attended the event. “They are willing to participate, and they want to interact with fans, thank them for their support. But at the same time, they want to be a part of benefiting worthy causes, and these are definitely three of them.”

**(plush) Uga that when you squeeze it or sit on it, it plays the fight song.” (ANDY McFEE | The Red & Black)**

After combining everything from ticket sales to corporate sponsorships and donations, the “Countdown to Kickoff” charity event raised more than \$100,000, which will be split among the three causes.

“The two things I think we were most able to accomplish today were to raise funding, but more importantly to raise awareness — the need for organ donors, the need to support pediatric healthcare and the huge impact these students are gonna have that have participated in Professor Horvat’s clinic and the lasting impression that they are having in their relationships with their kids,” Stinchcomb said. “Jermaine Phillips and Doug are a great example of that.”

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