WORK HARD
PLAY HARD
New eateries have opened in Columbia

BY NOAH HIGGINS-DUNN AND EMILY Aiken
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A Jamaican restaurant, a coffee shop, a Cajun crab house and a restaurant that houses adoptable cats are all new eateries that have opened in Columbia over the past few months.

Papa’s Cat Café
Where: 14 S. 2nd St.
When: Opened late July
Details: Husband and wife duo Ryan Kennedy and MacKenzie Everett-Kennedy opened one of Missouri’s few cat cafés at 14 S. 2nd St. The café has two rooms — one operates as a cat café selling Fretboard Coffee and snacks, the other keeps cats eligible for adoption. Snacks, the other keeps cats eligible for adoption.

“Still, there’s something about making people happy that is very fulfilling,” Carter said.

Fluffybutt Cookies
Where: 308 Business Loop 70 W.
When: Opened early July
Details: A new eatery opened last month that gives Columbia what it didn’t have: fresh seafood. Cajun Crab House mixes saltwater fish and shrimp with Cajun spice on its menu.

“Since moving here, he said he decided to open the restaurant because of the high-traffic area. He hopes for future growth, possibly totaling three locations in Columbia.

Cajun Crab House
Where: 308 Business Loop 70 W.
When: Opened early July
Details: A seafood specialty eatery with a focus on Cajun cuisine and fresh-caught seafood, offers customers Cajun cuisine on its menu.

Cajun Crab House is open Monday through Thursday from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., Friday and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Tropical Smoothie Cafe
Where: 603 N. Stadium Blvd.
When: Opened June 16
Details: Tropical Smoothie Cafe features a variety of smoothies and sandwich-type foods. The menu features wraps, bowls, flatbreads, sandwiches, breakfast and build-your-own smoothies.

Tropical Smoothie Cafe is open Monday through Saturday from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

By Zhihan Huang/Missourian

JENNA SIEGEL/MISSOURIAN

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City offers volunteer opportunities for fall

By Alexiss Allison

When it comes to volunteering, it turns out it’s not the thought that counts. A recent study by a Do Good Institute found that, although more students entering college say they value helping others now than in the past 20 years, volunteerism in high school students and college students has declined or stayed stagnant for about the last decade.

During that same time period, college students consistently volunteered fewer hours than their high school counterparts. They may be missing out on something that’s not only helpful to others, but to themselves as well, according to a 2005 study on the benefits of volunteering. The study found evidence that people who regularly volunteer are physically and mentally healthier, and more likely to enjoy their lives.

Volunteering is also an opportunity for professional growth, according to Amber Olson, volunteer program specialist with the city of Columbia. “It’s an opportunity to learn about yourself, what interests you, your passion. It’s also a great opportunity to network and to build some of your skills,” she said.

But it’s more than resume-building, she added. Volunteering allows people to give back in their community, however temporary it may be.

“The innate nature of it is that it’s a great just to take care of your environment, to take care of where you live,” Olson said. “The smallest things make a huge impact.”

The city of Columbia will host several volunteer events this fall at various locations around the city, for students, and all count toward service hours. Here are five:

**Neighborhood Park Fun Days**

Description: A block party at local parks designed to connect neighbors through games and activities.

Commitment: One-time or ongoing

Number of volunteers needed: 10 per Wednesday

Volunteer Duties: Set up & clean up. Play games and create crafts with neighborhood kids.

Training needed? No

How to register: Visit www.como.gov/volunteer to sign up.

**Annual Heritage Festival & Craft Show**

Description: A festival where traditional craftsmen (“lots arts”) display their products, drive in traditional regalia and remember the past.

Commitment: One-time or ongoing

Number of volunteers needed: 60 per Wednesday

Volunteer Duties: Set up & clean up. Put games on the stage for neighborhood kids.

Training needed? No

How to register: Visit www.como.gov/volunteer to sign up.

**Bear Creek Run Half-Marathon**

Description: A 13.1-mile run/walk that begins and ends at Oak Park.

Commitment: One-time or ongoing

Number of volunteers needed: 25 per location

Volunteer Duties: Pick up litter. Training needed? No

How to register: Visit www.como.gov/volunteer to sign up.

**Hinkson Clean Sweep**

Description: Pick up litter. Training needed? No, but wear closed-toed shoes and clothes that can get dirty. Equipment (gloves and trashbags) will be provided.

Commitment: One-time or ongoing

How to register: Visit www.como.gov/volunteer to sign up.

Columbia Crawdads

Description: Ongoing litter pick-up along creeks in various locations.

Commitment: One-time or ongoing

How to register: Visit www.como.gov/volunteer to sign up.

**Hinkson Clean Sweep**

Description: Pick up litter. Training needed? No, but wear closed-toed shoes and clothes that can get dirty. Equipment (gloves and trashbags) will be provided.

Commitment: Ongoing

How to register: Visit www.como.gov/volunteer to sign up.
Try catfish, burgers and live music at The Station House

BY NOAH HIGGINS-DUNN
news@columbiamissourian.com

If you’re ready to explore a new restaurant outside the greater Columbia area, The Station House at Katfish Katy’s near McBaine could be your destination for a weekend food adventure.

Eating at The Station House is like enjoying a meal at a backyard party. The restaurant can seat up to 120 people in a large, covered patio surrounded by an open lawn with wooden picnic tables.

The Station House has a full-service kitchen where patrons can order food through a walk-up window. Menu items include the popular hand-patted Big Tree Burger and Katfish Tacos served with fire roasted salsa and a jalapeno ranch sauce.

Zac Cutler and his wife, Laura, used to operate a general store on the 170-acre land that is now home to The Station House. What once used to be a campground was transformed into a kitchen, bar and outdoor event space in 2016.

The couple used to enjoy the surrounding area's recreation, such as close access to the Missouri River and the Katy Trail. Now, they welcome everyone to enjoy it too.

Cutler said the restaurant was designed to be a simple, casual and fun environment. The remodel included construction of two stages on the property — a small stage inside the pavilion and a large stage in a corner of the lawn — for live music and events.

The outdoor dining space, with fire-engine red walls and a pristine white trim, sits near a portion of the Katy Trail, just around the corner from the restaurant.

“We aren’t a designated state of Missouri Katy Trail trailhead, but we do encourage people to come down and park, go for a bike ride and then come back and eat lunch,” Cutler said.

In mid-September, Cutler said a bicycle-themed corn maze will be etched into the surrounding field. Nearby, Katfish Katy’s offers seasonal passes to its Missouri River boat ramp.

The Station House is open from 5 to 9 p.m. on Fridays and from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Depending on the weather, Cutler said The Station House will remain in operation until late October or early November, and will reopen in the spring.

An events calendar can be found on the restaurant website, along with information about scheduling private events.

PHOTOS BY JENNA KIESER/Missourian

Customers line up to order food at The Station House at Katfish Katy’s, which serves “American outdoor” food, including its popular catfish tacos and local beer.

ABOVE: A group of customers record a live band with their phones this summer at The Station House at Katfish Katy’s. The Station House is open only on the weekends and features local live bands for customers to enjoy while they eat.

BELOW: The Station House at Katfish Katy’s had a complete transformation in 2016, making access to the restaurant easier for all customers.

Catfish tacos are served to customers at The Station House at Katfish Katy’s. The catfish tacos are a popular choice among customers.
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Take a journey toward inclusion

At least 1,000 people learned more about diversity last spring. A new journey begins in January

BY ALEXIS ALLISON
news@columbiamissourian.com

This year’s incoming seniors were welcomed when students’ protocols about race and racial inequality on campus were scrutinized.

That was fall 2015, and in the three years since, the UM system and organizations throughout Columbia have worked to create a posture of self-examination, reflection and inclusion in local schools, businesses, nonprofits and people.

“We want a community where everyone gets along, everyone has a place, feels like they belong, but we know that comes to the forefront of the Inclusive Impact Institute, one of the prominent bodies that partner with the UM system locally.

One resulting project, the Inclusive Journey, began in January 2016 and will hold a culmination ceremony Aug. 23. A second Inclusive Journey begins at the Columbia Values Initiative breakfast in January 2020.

The question is that the journey should never end, it’s continuous,” McGruder said.

For the journey, participants took an online test to determine their biases.

Then, they picked from a list of free, thought-provoking events meant to enlighten and then mitigate these biases.

For each event, they received a new stamp in a passport they were given.

In the event of a successful effort, participants had more than 35 events to choose from, according to Karen Uttech, a member of the Journey Toward Inclusive Excellence planning committee.

One recurring event, for example, was a poverty simulation.

Participants adopted new personas with varying incomes and learned about the barriers low-income households face daily.

For another event, they were given grocery money and told to budget, once participants took part in a “privilege walk.” They lined up and stepped forward or backward depending on advantages or disadvantages they’d received in life.

For example, if their parents came to the U.S. by choice, they took one step forward. If they had been stepped and questioned by the police because of their race, they took one step back.

The walk addressed privilege of many types — occupational, racial, gender and sexual identity, to name a few.

More than 1,000 participants from all walks of life signed up to receive passes.

The journey is for everyone, McGruder said. She’s even discussed it with her 5-year-old and 9-year-old daughters.

“Why is that?” she said. “Because we aren’t all the same and we have to recognize each other’s differences and appreciate them.”

Students interested in participating in the next phase of the Inclusive Journey can do the following:

Volunteer: The Inclusive Excellence celebration will take place 7:30 a.m. — 12:30 p.m. on Aug. 25 at the Columbia Values Initiative Amphitheater. The event needs volunteers to clean up tear down and serve as traffic controllers.

Study: Race Matters: Framed as a local social justice activism group, will hold a diversity & inclusion book club this fall. The book, “What Does it Mean to be White” by Robin DiAngelo, explores for a white audience how to think and talk about race. For more information, email smartnews@acaudubonmoh@gmail.com. For those not interested in group study, McGruder recommends listening to NPR’s Code Switch podcast and reading “So You Want to Talk About Race” by Ijeoma Oluo, two resources that have been especially educational for her.

Participants.

In November, the Inclusive Journey will hold a swap meeting for those who want to learn more but did not participate in the first journey. In early January, the next journey will kick off at the Columbia Values Diversity breakfast. Check the Inclusive Journey website for details and updates.
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Wide-ranging influences drove the band’s signature music style, which sounds like it would be right at home in a 1970s record label. “Honestly, we don’t know where we’re going, we just know it sounds like a rock tune, or pop song, or funk tune — doesn’t really matter to us,” she said. “It’s more like these care aesthetics that we sort of growing older, like great melodies and funky rhythms.”

Some of the band’s novelty has come from their slickly-produced YouTube videos of original songs and stylish covers. “You’re a band, whatever you see is what you get,” Price said. “We’re playing the instruments. We’re singing. There’s no auto-tune. There’s no tracks. There’s no vocals.”

Those great melodies and funky rhythms have earned the band a growing fanbase, as they just played their largest show ever in Portland, Maine, selling over 6,000 tickets. “What’s so great about this band is the success has already been enormous,” Price said. “Which is great because we’ve actually been able to process it while it’s happening. And we’re given a chance to grow accustomed to it a little bit before the larger audiences than we were a year ago.”

Lake Street Dive happy to be back in Columbia

BY CARY LITTLEJOHN

Lake Street Dive

30 bands at Roots N Blues

Avett Brothers, Sturgill Simpson, Lake Street Dive among lineup, plus usual food and art

BY CARY LITTLEJOHN

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

D a y,
30 bands at Roots N Blues
G. Love and Special Sauce perform during the 2016 Roots N Blues N BBQ Festival. Earlier in the day, G. Love performed Sublime’s “What I Got” with from downtown to accom-

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Lake Street Dive happy to be back in Columbia

BY CARY LITTLEJOHN
High expectations for MU volleyball

BY KALEIGH FELDKAMP
news@columbiamissourian.com

The MU volleyball team will have to live up to some high expectations going into the 2018 season. The team is projected to finish third in the SEC by league coaches this upcoming season, something head coach Wayne Kreklow said is giving the team a lot to think about.

“There’s excitement going into the season because expectations are high,” he said. “But then you have to live up to those expectations.”

A talented roster of newcomers and veterans are poised to give the team momentum going into the year, Kreklow said. Approximately 50 percent of the team is new this year, a combination of transfer students and one true freshman.

With so many new players on the court this year, Kreklow said the coaching staff will need to rely on returning players and their experience.

“Returning players will form the nucleus for this year,” he said. One of those returning players is libero Riley Sents, a redshirt junior from Iowa. Despite having so many new players this year, she said the team hasn’t had any trouble finding its chemistry.

The transfers bring a lot of energy to the team, Sents said. They’re going to be awesome assets this year.

The team is hoping to improve on a successful 22-12 record last season, something Kreklow believes is possible with such a talented roster.

“This is one of the most athletic teams, top to bottom, we’ve ever had here,” he said. “They’re going to be really fun to watch.”
Five key 2018 games for the Tigers

By Ryan Goode

The Tigers scored 72 points in the first game of the season against Lafayette, Indiana. Despite being picked in the SEC East, the team finished fourth in the conference, at or below fourth in consecutive years. That could be the difference between finishing first and finishing fourth. The team finished the regular season with a 7-6 record and qualified for a bowl game, where they lost to Texas, 33-16, in the Academy Sports + Outdoors Texas Bowl. The Tigers scored 72 points in the first game of the season, finishing fourth in the Southeastern Conference’s East division in 2018, the same place the team finished in 2017. The team was picked by the media to finish fourth in the Southeastern Conference’s East division in 2018, the same place the team finished in 2017. After the departure of Josh Heupel as offensive coordinator and the addition of Derek Dooley in the vacant position, Odum and the Tigers look to build on the flashes of talent and dominance that fans got a glimpse of in 2017.

To prove media personnel wrong and to reach another bowl game, the Tigers have to demonstrate the team is capable of coming back like it did in the second half of last season.

Here are five key Tigers games in 2018 — four that are consecutive — that could be the difference between finishing first and finishing fourth. The Tigers went to 10-3 last year (187 yards and one touchdown), the quarterback-wide receiver duo of Jake Bentley and Deebo Samuel. While Bentley didn't have an extraordinary game last year (187 yards and one touchdown), he combined for 318 total yards in the game and ran in the final three quarters. For many, Georgia is only as good as its quarterback. The Bulldogs return sophomore quarterback Jacob Eason's untimely knee sprain to start the season. The Gamecocks had on defense, which included linebackers Darius Mack, Lorenzo Carter and Tyrell Adams, who combined for 31 tackles. Missouri's only non-conference game this season is a rematch of last year’s game, which was 10-3 home defeat to South Carolina. South Carolina has been considered the favorite to finish second in the SEC East after its 2017 campaign that saw the Gamecocks go 8-5 and beat Michigan in the Outback Bowl. Last year's game saw the Tigers jump out to 10-0 lead in the first quarter and never look back, a lead that was squandered during the Gamecocks' 31-3 run in the final three quarters. The loss was the catalyst for Missouri's five-game losing streak in 2017.

This year's matchup will feature familiar players from last year's quarterback-wide receiver duo of John Tolzey and Devos Zamour. While Zamour didn't have an extraordinary game last year (157 yards and one touchdown), he combined with a player that will invite a quarterback to do so. The Tigers will try to rebound following last year's "Battle of the Columbias," which was a 31-3 home defeat to South Carolina. South Carolina has been considered the favorite to finish second in the SEC East after its 2017 campaign that saw the Gamecocks go 8-5 and beat Michigan in the Outback Bowl. Last year's game saw the Tigers jump out to 10-0 lead in the first quarter and never look back, a lead that was squandered during the Gamecocks' 31-3 run in the final three quarters. The loss was the catalyst for Missouri's five-game losing streak in 2017.

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in 2014, where the Crimson Tide Alabama in the SEC title game probably since the Tigers played Bama SEC East. The Tigers in contention to win the game after a miraculous win could have. Defensive lineman DJ Wonnum as well as limiting the disruption that production of Bentley and Samuel, as Tigers to have a shot at winning his college career. In order for the touchdown in last year’s game and the return ability of former South Carolina alum Alshon Jeffery offers the pass-catching ability of ball’s most exciting players. Samuel watch list and is one of college foot- Maxwell Award watch list. Lots of attention after his selection to the offensive Tua Tagovailoa — who threw experienced Jalen Hurts and the explo- culminating in the school’s 17th national title. Alabama boasts a deep receiving corps that includes championship player DeVonta Smith, Henry Ruggs III and Jerry Jeudy, as well as Damien Harris, Josh Jacobs, Najee Harris and Brian Robinson Jr. As both big contributors to the Gators, with the media predict- increased the public confidence in the Gators, with the media predict- two national titles as a coordina- tor and six bowl wins as a head coach. Florida is the most important game.

Welcome Back, Students!

At Florida

Nov. 3, TBA, in Gainesville, Flor- ida. The Tigers’ matchup against Florida is the most important game during the season’s final month. That honor would have been given to the Tennessee game on Nov. 17, given the addition of Jer- ryz Pratt as head coach, who was the defensive coordinator for Ala- bama’s national title team this past year.

However, the meeting with Flor- ida offers up a more interesting discussion. Florida has a new head coach in Dan Mullen, who coached Mississippi State for many years until he decided to leave for Gaines- ville at the end of last season. Prior to being Mississippi State’s head coach, Mullen was the quar- terback coach and offensive coordinator at Florida under coach Urban Meyer. Meyer’s coaching resume boasts two national titles as a coordina- tor and six bowl wins as a head coach. His coaching pedigrees has increased the public confidence in the Gators, with the media predict- ing Florida to finish third in the SEC East, ahead of Missouri.

That’s what makes everything interesting: this Florida team has several players from last year’s matchup, where the Tigers dominat- ed the Gators in a 45-16 blowout in Columbia. The Gators, along with the disappointing loss to the Tigers, went 4-7 in 2017.

Florida will be led by redshirt sophomore quarterback Feleipe Franks, who threw nine touch- downs and six interceptions in 2017 Florida’s hopes that Franks will at least match Franks and be able to stay healthy. The Gators will have to rely on the likes of run- ning back Jordan Scarlett, offensive lineman Martez Ivey and defensive back Chauncey Gardner Jr. as the game changes the team will need to make.

Florida has a team that several media members believe is better, but a similar team to the one that lost to the Tigers last year.

The Tigers must be wary of a Florida defense led by cornerbacks Tyrann Mathieu and D’Andre Walker, who are coming off a wild 2017 season that ended in a 26-23 dramatic loss to the Tigers. In the final game, the Gators led by nine points with 25 seconds remaining in the game, but Missouri rallied over Missouri, 42-13.

This is easily the biggest oppo- nent Missouri has played in several seasons, but if Missouri could find a way to sneak a win in Tuscaloosa, it could change the Tigers’ perception in the SEC East. Missouri would be seen as the favorites to win the SEC and possibly be a team that could make the College Football Playoff.

Missouri wide receiver Emanuel Hall rushes upfield during the second quarter of the Nov. 4 game against Florida at Faurot Field.

2018 SCHEDULE

■ Sept. 1 vs. UT Martin; 3 p.m., Memorial Stadium, Faurot Field, Columbia; SEC Network Alternate
■ Sept. 8 vs. Wyoming; 6 p.m., Faurot Field, Columbia; SEC Network Alternate
■ Sept. 15 vs. Purdue; 6:30 p.m., West Lafayette, Indiana; Big Ten Network
■ Sept. 22 vs. Georgia; TBA, Memorial Stadium, Faurot Field
■ Oct. 6 vs. South Carolina; TBA, Columbia, South Carolina
■ Oct. 13 vs. Alabama; TBA, Tuscaloosa, Alabama
■ Oct. 20 vs. Memphis (Homecoming); TBA, Memorial Stadium, Faurot Field, Columbia
■ Oct. 27 vs. Kentucky; TBA, Memorial Stadium, Faurot Field, Columbia
■ Nov. 3 vs. Florida; TBA, Gainesville, Florida
■ Nov. 10 vs. Vanderbilt; TBA, Memorial Stadium, Faurot Field, Columbia
■ Nov. 17 vs. Tennessee; TBA, Knoxville, Tennessee
■ Nov. 23 vs. Arkansas; 3:30 p.m., Memorial Stadium, Faurot Field, Columbia

Welcome Back, Students!
After a promising first season with Coach Cuonzo Martin, the Mizzou men’s basketball team is poised to continue its successes with new transfers and freshmen stars.

Jordan Barnett’s impressive senior season led to him signing with the Milwaukee Bucks for the Las Vegas Summer League where he averaged 6.5 points shooting 40 percent from the field. He’s staying with the team for their training camp this fall where he’ll vie for a spot on the active roster.

Although Michael Porter Jr. played limited minutes with the Tigers due to health issues, he was drafted fourteenth by the Denver Nuggets in the NBA Draft. He underwent another back surgery in July, and the Nuggets said he’s staying with the team for their training camp this fall where he’ll vie for a spot on the active roster.

Kassius Robertson, the first-team SEC graduate transfer from Illinois, signed with the German basketball club Medi BC with the Basketball Bundesliga league. Picking up the slack on the team are a host of talented freshmen from around the country.

Tigers basketball looks to continue success with incoming freshmen after committing from Illinois the previous year, Javon Pickett decided to spend a year preparing before enrolling in college. He is a reliable scorer and will be a valuable rebounding asset as well. He has a good relationship with center Jeremiah Tilmon. The chemistry between the two will be something to watch for.

Lastly, Parker Braun joined the team as a preferred walk-on. He shared an AAU basketball team with Tigers star Jontay Porter on the MoKan Elite. It’s expected that he’ll receive a scholarship after his freshman season and it’s unclear whether or not he will redshirt his first season in Columbia.
Anderson takes over the reins of Mizzou softball

BY MATTHEW HALL
news@missourian.com

AND KALEIGH FELDKAMP
BY KALEIGH FELDKAMP
news@missourian.com

Anderson was previously the head coach at Hofstra for four years, where she led the team to a 130-73-1 record and two NCAA Tournament appearances. Before becoming head coach, she spent 13 years on the coaching staff there. Ten of her years at Hofstra were spent as the associate head coach. "From the beginning of our search, our goal was to find a coach who has demonstrated success, academically and on the field, while also sharing our values to win it right and believe in the university’s mission. Larsa has demonstrated the values, character and qualities that we believe are necessary to be successful. She is not only a great coach, but also a great human being. We are thrilled to announce Larsa Anderson as our new head coach and believe she is the perfect fit for Mizzou Softball."
The human-health path to med, PA and dental school

Want to learn more about how Human Physiology and Translational Science can further your clinical career goals? Attend the pre-med/pre-dental/pre-vet “speed-dating” event, 5:30–7 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 6, in Room 2206A-C of the MU Student Center.

2018 SEC football preview: This year, put your money on Georgia and Alabama

BY RYAN GOODE
news@columbiamissourian.com

Another year of Southeastern Conference football is set to kick off Aug. 30 when Texas A&M welcomes Northwestern State to Kyle Field in College Station. That being said, there’s already enormous buzz around the conference, and there hasn’t been a more anticipated start to the season.

A major story line in the SEC this fall falls in the fact that six teams will welcome the SEC for the first time: Arkansas (Chad Morris), Florida (Dan Mullen), Mississippi State (Joe Moor- head), Ole Miss (Matt Luke), Tennessee (Jeramy Pruitt) and Texas A&M (Jimbo Fisher).

To set in motion that "rich got richer," as Alabama will bring on former Tennessee coach Lane Kiffin to coach the Vols.

Six schools are playing new coaches — one who’s a former national title-winning head coach (Jimbo Fisher), two at their first year of being head coach for a Power Five school (Chad Morris and Joe Moorhead) and one who left one school in the conference for another (Dan Mullen).

In the end, this story line may take a backseat to ones about the conference juggernauts. Will Georgia repeat as conference champions for the first time in 15 years? Are there national champions? Those are some teams that are not to be taken lightly.

Three teams are in the mix to contend for the SEC East. The first is the University of Florida. How will the defense do under new offensive coordinator Brian Johnson? How will the offense do under new defensive coordinator Dan Mullen? That’s the test as he will try to add to his reputation as "quarterback whisperer," and while his offense is there to add to his resume.

Georgia: The Bulldogs may well be the team to beat in the SEC East, as well as the conference as a whole.

The division and conference championship game could be a long way to go to bounce back from last year’s heartbreaking, 26-23 loss to Alabama in the College Football Playoff national championship game.

The Dawgs by all means have everything necessary to get back to the SEC East, as well as the conference as a whole. Georgia has the second-ranked offense in the country in Rodrigo Blankenship, who nailed a 50-yard field goal to give Georgia a three-point lead over Alabama in overtime of the national championship game.

In addition, the team has the most dangerous junior in the SEC in Rodrigo Blankenship, who nailed a 50-yard field goal to give Georgia a three-point lead over Alabama in overtime of the national championship game.

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Another team that could make the most noise in the SEC East is Florida.

Coming off a 9-4 season that ended with an Outback Bowl win over Michigan and a blowout 33-16 loss to Texas last year’s NCAA champion, the Gators will look to make a run at the SEC East title once again. Florida has certain pieces to go along with its solid defense.

The running back for Florida will be the team’s offense this season. The Gators have the talent to be the team’s most important position in the SEC East, as well as the SEC. Florida has been considered a national title contender all season long. Mullen has been considered a national title contender all season long. His reputation will be put to the test as he will try to add to his resume.

Another team the media believes could compete in the SEC East is Florida. One of the six teams with a new head coach, coach Dan Mullen and Florida will look to make a run at the SEC East title once again. Florida has certain pieces to go along with its solid defense.

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Alabama can boast teams so humbly that winning the division and conference proves to be an unnecessary task to validate the team as one of the country’s top four. The Tide’s 2018 campaign will feature a number of returning players from last year’s title-winning squad, including running back Damien Harris, offensive lineman Jonah Williams, linebacker Mack Wilson and defensive linemen Raekwon Davis to name a few. Not to mention how the Tide have a quartet of quarterback, Jamarr Bowser, All-American wide receiver Ryan Davis, linebacker Micah trajectory and Auburn — a Heisman hopeful — under head coach Nick Saban. The Tide’s biggest rival is Auburn, which looks to spoil Alabama’s plan of continued divisional success — and almost did last year.

The Tigers are coming off a season where they were able to win the SEC West with the potential to be “gangbusters” in the division — Mississippi State, with the combination of Sweat and Simmons makes Mississippi State’s defensive line the most formidable unit in the conference, and arguably, the country. The drawback for the Bulldogs is the secondary. All were preseason first-team All-SEC selections. The Bulldogs also have Montez Sweat and Jeffery Simmons on the defensive line, which both players selected to the preseason first-team All-SEC squad. The combination of Sweat and Simmons makes Mississippi State’s defensive line into the most formidable unit in the conference, and arguably, the country.

The Bulldogs have a good collection of talent, but not nearly as much as Alabama or Auburn. Add in the fact that it’s a mystery whether or not Moorhead has the prowess to coach at this level of football, and it becomes easy to deduce that it will be unlikely that Mississippi State enters the conversation alongside Alabama and Auburn as a serious divisional contender.

Likely scenario
We’ll most likely see some variation of Georgia taking on Alabama or Auburn at Mercedes Benz Stadium in Atlanta on Dec. 1. While the talent and competition of the other teams is noteworthy, the Dawgs, the Tigers and the Tide all represent themselves as the cream of the crop in the conference.

However, anything can happen in the regular season prior to the conference title games — injuries, suspensions, coaching mishaps and otherwise performances. That’s the beauty of football. Any team can win on any given Sunday — or, in this case, Saturday.

Nothing is set in stone, but you’d be smart to put your money on a team from Georgia and a team from Alabama reaching the SEC title games.

Missouri tight end Kendall Blanton completes a 5-yard touchdown pass while Florida defensive back Jeawon Taylor defends during the first quarter on Nov. 4, 2017 at Faurot Field.

Blanton caught the first touchdown of the game.

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN THURSDAY, August 23, 2018 — Page 15D

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