

## Best Sports Column

Steven Johnson

*The Southerner*, Grady High School

# Little people rule Olympics



STEVEN JOHNSON

As the Olympics began, a lot of the hoopla was focused on specific sports and athletes. A great deal of noise was made about the American men's basketball team and their search for some sort of motivation.

There was also chatter surrounding Michael Phelps, the 19-year-old star swimmer who everybody was certain would tie or even break Mark Spitz's record of seven gold medals in one Olympic games. Phelps was supposed to be the best thing since sliced bread and nearly proved it as he won eight medals (six golds and two bronzes).

There was talk about everything, it seemed, except for one very important sport. A sport that snuck up and slapped us all in the face. No, I'm not talking about archery or synchronized swimming or even trampoline jumping. I'm talking about the mightiest American athletes we sent overseas to Greece: our men's and women's gymnastic teams.

That's right. They may seem small, but every single one of those little balls-of-fury was conditioned to perform in a big way. The men's team, going into Athens, had not won a medal in 20 years. But that didn't matter one bit to them. They waltzed into the gym, focused, and took care of business when it counted. Surprising everyone, they won silver and snapped the 20-year draught like a dry twig.

But they didn't stop there. Two nights after the men's team won their unexpected silver, Paul Hamm turned out a spectacular performance in the men's overall to win gold by a .012 margin; the closest margin of victory in the event ever.

It was amazing. After he virtually knocked the judges' table over when he missed badly on his vault landing, destroying all but a sliver of his hope for a gold medal, he turned it on. Hamm collected himself as only the special ones can, and drilled his next routine on the parallel bars. Sticking his landing, he received a 9.837, one of the best scores awarded all night. And just like that, he catapulted himself from no man's land 12th all the way up to fourth place.

In the last event of the night, Hamm needed a

9.825 on the high bar just to tie Kim Dae Eun from South Korea for the gold. He was under pressure that would make any normal man whimper, put his tail between his legs and run away as fast as possible.

Instead, Hamm completed an amazing routine by sticking his landing perfectly and receiving his magic 9.837 once again. With his gold medal, he became the only American man ever to win the competition. It was one of those moments, those classic Olympic moments, when goose bumps run all over your body and all you want to do is leap for joy like an 8-year-old on Christmas morning. It was nothing short of spectacular.

And then there was the women's team. With a squad considered to be one of the best American teams ever sent to the Olympics, they, and everyone else back in the States, hoped and prayed for nothing less than gold. In the end, however, the Romanian team snatched the gold by only seven-tenths of a point over the Americans. Seven-tenths of a point that was solely lost based on extremely minor mistakes.

Carly Patterson grazed her feet on the uneven bars. Mohini Bhardwaj wobbled on the balance beam. Courtney Kupets didn't land where she was supposed to.

Even with all the drama of the night, the women still managed to get silver. They gathered themselves, swallowed their mistakes and went back out there with gleaming smiles that would put a head cheerleader to shame. They didn't quit, and that's by far the most important accomplishment they made all night.

Plus, two days later, Carly Patterson returned to the same gym in which she had finished a somewhat sour second, and became the third woman in U.S. history to win gold in the individual all-around competition. She and the rest of the team could've pulled a Jason Kidd and skipped the Olympics because they were tired, because they needed to rest. But to Kidd these Olympics are an extracurricular activity that requires maximum effort but doesn't get you paid. For the gymnasts, these Olympics are everything. Their alpha and omega; their bread and butter. And their extraordinary triumph under such intense pressure is therefore a beautiful, beautiful thing. □

### Judge's Comments:

Easily tops in its division. Three well written columns which were easy to follow. Students would probably enjoy your take on the sports scene at your high school.

## Best Sports Feature

### “Senior Guard Quits Before State”

Natalia Farrer

*The Liberty*, Berkmar High School

# Senior guard quits weeks before team goes to state

Natalia Farrer  
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Two weeks before the Patriots advanced to the state championship tournament after a three-year hiatus, senior guard Keyshore Williams walked out on the team.

It all started at the Jan. 21 Parkview game. The Panthers were trailing Berkmar by six with minutes left on the clock, but suddenly, perhaps sensing impending defeat, Parkview rallied up for a 30-0 run which left Berkmar breathless and 28 points down.

The Patriots were bombarded with fouls by the refs. Berkmar fans watched in horror as Parkview scored point after point from free throws and three-pointers.

And Keyshore Williams was mad.

Head coach Bennie Gibbs had taken Williams out of the game for making a bad shot. Yet Williams had just witnessed senior Chad Hixon take an equally mis-

judged shot.

“But Coach Gibbs just sat there,” Williams said.

So Williams said as much to Gibbs.

“I was just voicing my opinion,” Williams said. “And he came in the locker room and said, ‘Don’t worry about what other people are doing. Worry about yourself.’”

Williams pointed out that Hixon had done the exact same thing that Gibbs had taken

him out of the game for doing.

“He said, ‘Then take off your uniform and get out.’”

So he got out.

“I left—after a few words,” he said.

But according to Williams’ former teammate senior Kelsey Maynor, the problem had begun before the Parkview upset.

“Actually, he had been upset for two weeks before that. He was mad that he wasn’t

getting the playing time [he wanted],” Maynor said. “So he started not putting in 100 percent for us, and he didn’t care anymore.”

“The Parkview game was the last straw.” Williams’ former teammates had mixed feelings on Keyshore’s decision to leave.

“Obviously any time a team loses a key player, it’s going to hurt,” said Hixon. “But sometimes it’s for the best.”

“I feel that he was wrong for leaving the team,” said senior Lamariel Lewis. “As a leader, he should have stayed.”

Williams hasn’t yet decided between playing for South Alabama, South Florida, Florida State, or the University of Miami in Florida. But he said quitting before the season ended wouldn’t influence the decisions of his college scouts.

“All the scouts know my coach didn’t know how to use me,” he said.

Gibbs had no comment.



L'ANITA WEILER

Williams struts around the court during half-time at the Meadowcreek game on Feb. 1 after quitting the team.



L'ANITA WEILER

Williams joins the team huddle rather unenthusiastically. Jan. 21's 28-point loss to Parkview was his last game.

## Best Sports Game Coverage

“Duel third place finishes at region”

Woody Morgan

*The Southerner*, Grady High School

### *Duel third-place finishes at region, sectionals send Grady girls to AA state meet*

By WOODY MORGAN

We've all heard about women's intuition, but when it comes to a coach's intuition about his women, Coach Jeff Cramer has it in the bag. Cramer foresaw the Grady girls cross country team finishing third at the regional meet on Oct. 21 at Our Lady of Mercy. In fact, Cramer's predictions of the top four teams was only off by one, switching the top two. Lovett finished in first place, followed by Pace, Grady, and then Decatur finishing up the lineup.

"We didn't run as fast as I would have liked, but we're where we thought we'd be," Cramer said.

The girls took it slow on their first lap at regionals. The team ran as a group despite the fact that their top runner was running in



Ella Miller

18<sup>th</sup> place after the first lap.

"[Cramer] wanted us to stay together for the first mile and then start pushing after that," said Arielle D'Avanzo, who finished 12<sup>th</sup> overall and was the first to finish for Grady. Coach Cramer had reasons to implement his strategy but second-guessed it afterwards. "It was hot, and I didn't want them to start out too fast, but we were almost too conservative," he said, "I think we did pick up a few spots on the second lap though."

Junior Emily Burke attributed the slow time to a lack of focus. "When people are running past smiling and waving at the crowd, you know they aren't putting all their

energy into their running," said Burke, who ran her personal best with a time of 22:23. Burke finished 16<sup>th</sup> overall and third for the team.

The Knight's third-place finish didn't get them an automatic pass to the state playoffs, but it did qualify them for sectionals. At sectionals, the third and fourth place teams from each region run and the top eight advance to the state meet. Grady advanced to state with another third-place finish at sectionals on Oct. 30 in Albany. Four of the freshman runners did not race because of their commitment to club soccer, preventing Grady from finishing first. Decatur runners finished one-two-three to take home the gold with Union County High School placing in second.

Last year the sectional meet was not even held because too few teams qualified to meet the minimum requirements to hold a race.

Cramer expected the girls to peak, or run their fastest of the season, at the regional meet and hold it for two or three more weeks. "We've done everything you can in order to get strong; now it's all about fine

tuning that," Cramer said.

As for who will be the top runners for Grady at the next two meets, Cramer is going with the healthiest and the fittest. "The girls pretty much know who it's going to be; they watch each other at practice," Cramer said. "I could ask them to pick the team, and they would pick the same starters I would. It depends on who is hot at the time."

There is no doubt that freshman phenom Arielle D'Avanzo is hot right now. She finished first for Grady and second overall at the APS City Championship on Oct. 13. She again finished first for Grady at regionals. "It's not unusual to have a young runner be so good," Cramer said. "The issue is, can they keep improving year after year?" "It's kind of intimidating being the youngest," said D'Avanzo, but her race results speak differently.

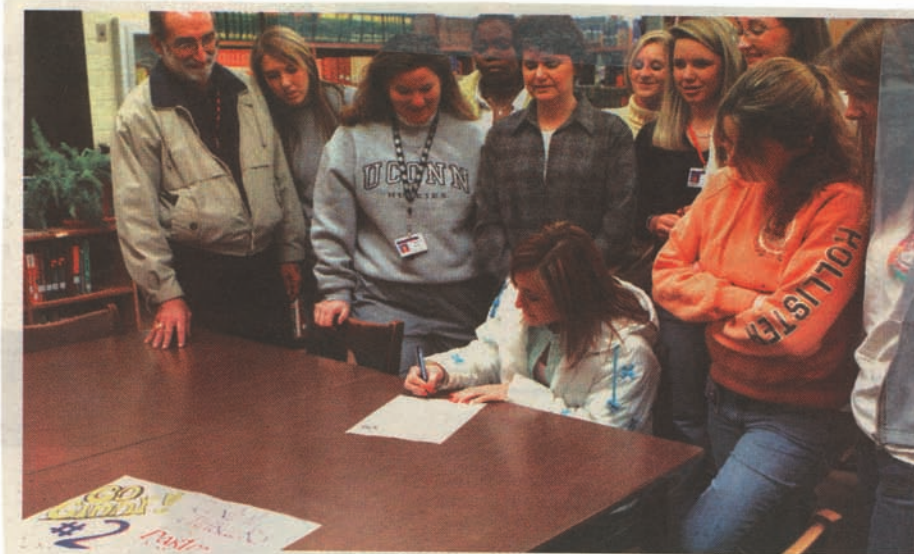
The final word on her success as a freshman runner, as well as the success of the team as a whole, will come Nov. 6 in Carrollton, when they will complete for a AA state championship. □

## Best Sports News TIE

### “Ginny Seredick Signs with Darton”

Courtney Amos

*The Central Post*, Central High School



Becky Fluke/CENTRAL POST

Senior Ginny Seredick signs with Darton College in Albany, as her family, friends, and fellow athletes watch.

## Senior Ginny Seredick signs with Darton

By COURTNEY AMOS  
Staff Writer

With the end of the year approaching, “college” becomes the buzz word among students and “scholarships” among teachers. Students can often hear teachers advising them to work hard and show determination in order to get these scholarships.

According to teachers, hard work can reward anyone who shows the drive, not only in the classroom, but in other aspects of their lives such as sports, as well. Such is the case for Senior softball player Ginny Seredick.

Three and a half years ago, Seredick joined the softball team as a freshman and has played each season since. While it is the end of her high school softball career, it is not the end of the road for Seredick who, on Jan. 25, signed a softball scholarship to Darton College in Albany, Georgia.

“It pays for everything, except some utilities. I have to pay a little for books, and I have to pay for things that I want,” said Seredick.

“I think it’s cool because I’ve always wanted to [play softball in college] and I finally get to. It’s just going to be fun because I get to meet new people and play the sport I love.”

Seredick, along with several fellow softball players, participated in tryouts at Darton College a few months ago in hopes to get the scholarship and a place on the roster. Two weeks later, she received a call and was asked if she wanted the opportunity. If so, she had until Dec. 1 to make a decision. Seredick accepted the chance to play softball for the college.

“She’s a hard worker. She’s very dedicated to softball. She has a good attitude and is always willing to learn,” said Softball Coach Jennifer Raymond. “Her speed and

her ability to drag and slap bunt from the left side is going to help Darton College.”

According to Raymond, Seredick’s ability to drag (trying to make contact with the ball while the defense is playing deep in the field) and slap bunt (assuming the bunt position to cause defense to move in, but then making enough contact to hit is past them) helped her to be one or two steps closer to first base, which along with her speed, helped to be an asset to the Charger team.

“I hope that she’ll continue to improve and continue on to a four year school after her two years at Darton College,” said Raymond.

Seredick, who has been coached by Raymond throughout her high school softball career, credits Raymond, her father and family for her success in softball and in life.

See Seredick Page 15

No comments available

# Best Sports News TIE

## “Signing Day at Northview”

Hence Cargo

*The Messenger*, Northview High School

### SPORTS

# Signing Day at Northview

When dreams become realities

#### Hace Cargo

Staff Writer

On Wednesday Feb. 2, seniors John Compton and Gershom Bigham signed national letters of intent to play college football as family, friends, and teammates watched in the Northview auditorium. Compton and Bigham are the first Northview football players to sign college scholarships since the football program began in the school's first year, 2002.

Bigham, a wide receiver, will attend the University of Alabama-Birmingham (UAB) as the first player to sign with a Division I school, and Compton, who plays running back, signed to become a Buccaneer at Division I-AA Charleston Southern University.

Before they signed, head football coach Don Savage addressed the football team saying, “This is the first of what we hope and expect will become an annual event.” Savage later commented, “This is just another step of our development. It happens at every school in this area every year. Now it's going to start happening here. We want our younger guys to see this and aspire to follow the path these

guys have set. Not everyone will play college ball—you have to be blessed with skill like these two guys and work really hard, which they have both done.”

Junior Kevin Jordan said, “This is encouraging to see two of our teammates make it to the next level. It gives us something to build on for next year as our team continues to get better and better.”

After the signing, Bigham's and Compton's family and friends celebrated with a cake and drinks as teammates gave their congratulations. Compton's father said, “I'm really proud of John. He came off a tough injury during his junior year and worked hard for a great senior season. He never got arrogant, he stayed a true team player, and now it's all paid off for him.”

Compton's mother gave much of the credit to the Northview coaching staff, commenting, “We appreciate the work of the coaches and staff in this program. It takes a

whole village to make this happen and I think we've found ourselves another great village at Charleston Southern.”

Ryan Blair, a teammate and good friend of both players, supported them saying, “These two really earned this over the past few years. It wasn't always easy, but they have been a big part of building this program and they deserve this opportunity.”

For Northview's administration, this was a “sign of things to come,” as assistant principal James Williams put it. “Hopefully the future will have this every year, and in greater numbers,” he said. “This opens the door for the

younger guys to pursue the same greatness these two have achieved.”

Mr. Williams said it was, “a great event for the players involved, the program they came out of, the school as a whole, and the entire Northview community that supports the team.”

Athletic director Rob Hunter agreed. “Northview football continues to be on the way up. This is how tradition starts.” He also showed his appreciation for Bigham and Compton, commenting, “These guys have set a great standard now and I hope they will continue to come back and remind everyone what we are capable of here.”

Bigham will be playing at a school that many consider to be “on the rise.” UAB has only been in Division I for nine seasons, but the Blazers participated in their first bowl game this season, representing Conference USA. The team had a 7-5 record last year with games Division I powers such as Florida State and Louisville. UAB finished third in Conference USA.

“I picked UAB because it's an excellent program that is a part of an excellent school and it's not far from home,” Bigham explained. “Starting next year I want to be a



BEN HARTZELL / Staff

John Compton signed to play with Charleston Southern University on Feb. 2.



BEN HARTZELL / Staff

Gershom Bigham signs as (clockwise from top center) football Coach Savage, Principal Zervakos, sister Saterah, parents, and Athletic Director Rob Hunter proudly watch.



## **Best Sports Photo**

“Kylie’s Catch”

Kylie Daniel

*Echo 2005*, Sprayberry High School



### **Judge’s Comments:**

A great peak-action football photo. Getting the ball on the fingertips is one of the most difficult things for a sports shooter to capture.