

PREP BASEBALL

## Eagles promote Bryan Linnell to head coach

By Will Hammock  
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Collins Hill's baseball program will change leaders after the 2022 season, the high school announced Monday.

The Eagles have promoted assistant Bryan Linnell to head coach for the 2022-23 school year as a replacement for outgoing head coach Zach Black. Black, who will remain the head coach this season, accepted the athletic director position at Walnut Grove last week.

"There is no doubt (Linnell) will build upon

the traditions established by those before him and move us towards a championship-caliber program," Collins Hill athletic director Scarlett Grantham said. "Coach Linnell fosters a championship culture both in his classroom, where he is an exceptional world history teacher, and on the field. He will be an impactful leader for our players, parents and the entire Collins Hill community."

Linnell has been an assistant baseball and assistant football coach at Collins Hill since 2019, when he moved down from



Bryan Linnell

Oakland High School in Murfreesboro, Tenn. He coached both sports at Oakland, winning two state titles in football, and moved to Georgia in 2019 to be closer to his youngest son, who had signed with LaGrange College. His parents lived in Gwinnett, so he and his wife (a teacher at McKendree Elementary) relocated to Gwinnett.

They landed in the Collins Hill district — their daughter now teaches math at Collins Hill and is a cheerleading coach — and he has played a part in the Eagles' historic

two-year run in football that culminated with the program's first state championship in the sport last season.

"The leadership here is second to none," Linnell said. "I've never been around a principal like Mrs. (Kerensa) Wing. I've never been around a whole leadership staff like we have here. Scarlett is fantastic. The place is absolutely fantastic. ... Zach Black is fantastic. He's one of the best humans I've met. Baseball aside, he's a great dude. Walnut Grove scored a big one with him. He's going to do fantastic there."

FALCONS



Kevin R. Wexler/NorthJersey.com

Linebacker Lorenzo Carter (59) and defensive lineman Leonard Williams (99) laugh after the first day of Giants practice on July 28, 2021.

## Norcross grad Carter heading home

From staff reports

Norcross grad Lorenzo Carter, a former Georgia Bulldogs standout, is headed to the Atlanta Falcons. ESPN reported Monday that Carter, an edge-rushing linebacker, plans to sign a one-year deal with the hometown Falcons. The 6-foot-5, 255-pounder had bid farewell to the Giants in a social media post on Sunday.

Edge rusher is a major position of need for the Falcons, who likely will continue to add players there in free agency and through April's NFL Draft.

Carter, 26, was a star in football and basketball at Norcross before signing with Georgia. He was a third-round pick of the Giants who showed improvement before tearing his Achilles early in the 2020 NFL season. He started slow last season in his comeback but finished strong with five sacks in the Giants' final four games.

He has 153 tackles, 14 1/2 sacks and 15 passes defended in four seasons with the Giants.

BASEBALL

## Duluth grad Carter fights for success at Lee

By George Starr  
Staff Correspondent

Lee University (Tenn.) pitcher Alan Zhang Carter is a perfect example of a talented athlete who faced his share of adversity, but refused to call it quits on reaching his dream of someday playing professional baseball.

His pitching career began at Duluth High School, where he set a school record, striking out 78 batters over 62 innings during his senior year. He accepted a scholarship offer from Columbus State University,

SEE CARTER, B2

# END OF AN ERA

## Falcons trade franchise cornerstone Ryan to Colts

From staff reports

The Atlanta Falcons have ended the Matt Ryan era, agreeing Monday to trade the most successful quarterback in franchise history.

Atlanta traded Ryan to the Indianapolis Colts on Monday in exchange for a 2022 third-round draft pick. The future of Ryan in Atlanta was questioned after the team looked into acquiring former Texans quarterback Deshaun Watson, a Gainesville native who eventually was traded to the Browns. Watson's deal would have been controversial as he is facing 22 civil suits for inappropriate conduct and sexual assault by a group of female massage therapists.

Ryan saw his \$7.5 million roster bonus delayed to this week — it was originally due March 18 — to see what happened with Watson. The team decided Monday to move on from Ryan, who reportedly will put a dead money hit of \$40.525 million on the Falcons' salary cap this season.

"Matt Ryan has been the epitome of a franchise quarterback during his time here in Atlanta," Falcons owner Arthur Blank said in a team release. "He has represented this organization with great class, professionalism and leadership, both on and off the field, over the past 14 years. It is difficult to overstate what he has meant to me personally, our organization, his teammates and our fans. From his first day in the building, Matt has given his all in the pursuit of winning a championship for Atlanta. His arrival in 2008 instantly made us a contender in the NFC and he's been our quarterback through the most successful era in Falcons history. ... (Ryan) is without question one of the greatest players in Falcons history. He will one day be added to our Ring of Honor, and it is my belief that a bust in Canton (for the Pro Football Hall of Fame) will follow in short order."

"This business is not without its difficult decisions, and while this is one of the most difficult decisions we have faced as a club, we feel it is in the best long-term interests of both the Atlanta Falcons and Matt Ryan. On behalf of the entire Falcons organization, I wish him success as he continues his career and know that he will bring the same dedication and professionalism to his next club. We also wish health and happiness to his wife Sarah and their twin boys, Johnny and Marshall."

Ryan, who turns 37 in May, has been the Falcons' starter since they drafted him third overall in 2008. He earned NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year honors that season and continued to put up prolific numbers throughout his 14 seasons in Atlanta.



Dale Zanine/USA Today Sports

Atlanta Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan (2) runs looking for a receiver against the Detroit Lions during the first half of a Dec. 26, 2021 game at Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

He threw for more than 4,000 yards every season from 2011 until 2020, and has at least 20 touchdown passes in every season of his career. He is a four-time Pro Bowl selection, as well as the NFL MVP in 2016, when he threw for 4,944 and 38 TDs while leading the Falcons to the Super Bowl.

"I've got so much respect for Matt Ryan and what he's meant to this franchise and to me personally in our one year together," Falcons head coach Arthur Smith said in a team release. "Matt was the ultimate professional and teammate every day. I'm thankful for our time together and wish he and his family the best as they transition to the next chapter of his professional journey."

"As we've said since we've started, we're always evaluating and looking for opportunities to improve our team for the long term. This move is another step in that and we're looking forward to the future."

Since his MVP season, the Falcons have struggled to win thanks in large part to a porous offensive line that has given up at least 40 sacks of Ryan each season. He played last season without a consistent receiving threat outside of rookie tight end Kyle Pitts after the team traded away Julio Jones and saw Calvin Ridley miss nearly the entire season.

Atlanta has struggled similarly on defense, which led to the firing of previous head coach Dan Quinn and the hiring of Smith before the 2021 season. Smith praised Ryan during and after last season, which saw him get hit more than any quarterback in the NFL, though the coach didn't commit to Ryan and his large salary for 2022 and beyond.

Ryan reportedly hoped to remain in Atlanta with a contract extension. Instead, the team signed veteran Marcus Mariota, who played for Smith in Tennessee, to a two-year contract later Monday. The Falcons could also look at the quarterback spot in April's draft, where the team holds

the No. 8 overall pick in the first round.

Mariota was originally selected by the Titans in the first round (second overall) of the 2015 NFL Draft out of Oregon. The 28-year-old has completed 1,128 of 1,795 attempts (62.8 percent) for 13,437 yards, 77 touchdowns and 45 interceptions for an 89.5 passer rating in 74 games (61 starts) for the Titans and Raiders. He has also rushed for 1,574 yards on 264 attempts (6.0 avg.) and 13 touchdowns. He spent the last two seasons with the Las Vegas Raiders.

He faces the ask of replacing one of the most legendary Falcons in Ryan.

"I've seen firsthand from within the division and within the building the type of leader Matt is," Falcons general manager Terry Fontenot said. "We thank him for being the consummate professional throughout this process and having the open dialogue as we work towards the best long-term plans for both sides. This was a difficult decision, but it was made easier by Matt's professionalism and understanding throughout."

"Our goal in every decision is to improve our organization for the long term. We believe today's agreement is the best long-term decision, not only for our organization, but also the best for Matt at this point, which is important for us. We wish he and his family the best in their next steps."

Ryan now will pursue his first Super Bowl title with the Colts, who are better equipped to win immediately while the Falcons go through rebuilding mode. Indianapolis has shuffled through quarterbacks during head coach Frank Reich's tenure, including a one-year trial with Carson Wentz before trading him recently to the Washington Commanders for two second-round picks. Indianapolis, which has posted a winning record three of the past four seasons with two playoff trips, already has a potent running game led by Jonathan Taylor.

PREP BASKETBALL

## South names Eric Dawson hoops coach

By Will Hammock  
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South Gwinnett has hired Eric Dawson as its new head girls basketball coach, the high school announced Monday.

Dawson has 15 years of coaching experience, including the last six as head girls basketball coach at Decatur.

"Eric Dawson connected immediately with our interview panel,"

South Gwinnett athletic director Jeff Taylor said. "His energy and enthusiasm are natural and authentic. Coach Dawson is committed to pushing our championship culture at South Gwinnett through positivity and relationship building. We're excited to work with Coach Dawson in our community."

Dawson, a Savannah native,



Eric Dawson

began his coaching career as an assistant at Miller Grove, helping the program to a state championship in 2012 and a state runner-up finish in 2013, along with two Final Four appearances, three Elite Eight appearances and a region title. He spent one season at Grady before being hired as Decatur's head coach.

During his time at Decatur, he

has led five of his six teams to the state tournament with multiple winning seasons. He graduated from Tuskegee University (Ala.) with a biology degree, and earned a master's degree in sports management from Georgia Southern.

He and his wife have two young sons, a 6-year-old and a 5-year-old. "Coach Eric Dawson is in the right seat on our bus at the right time," South principal Dorothy Jarrett said. "He has already proven

that he is all in as a new shining Comet. He has been a spectator at many of our sports activities at our feeder middle schools and high school programs promoting our cluster motto, 'Working Together, Winning Together, PreK-12.'

He replaces outgoing head girls coach Kidada Holtzclaw, who coached the program since the 2013-14 season. The Comets went 4-20 in 2021-22.