

CALVIN CRUCE/Staff

FLOAT LIKE A BUTTERFLY: Georgia's Rodney Hampton shakes off pregame butterflies and finds running room.

Dogs' Hampton runs like a dream in his debut between the hedges

ATHENS — The senses of a Georgia autumn are now engaged: You see little blond girls in red football jerseys numbered 34 ... You see red and black suspenders, a red and black skateboard, trash cans red and black, even a woman's lips red and black (one of each) ... "Glory, Glory" comes tootling out of a happy van ... You smell the tailgaters' fried chicken ... With each step nearer Sanford Stadium, you hear the rising hubbub of 75,000 zealots eager to get on with the rites of another autumn.

You see a father walking across campus, in red slacks, red shirt, black ball cap, and he puts an arm around his teenage daughter. He says, "This is where you want to come to school, huh?" She says with a giggle and smile, "You bet," and they walk on in shared contentment.

... You see a bumper sticker: "Ralph Smith is 80!!! And He's STILL in the Dawghouse!!!" You see the hedges at the football field's boundaries, the perfect hedges, trimmed to square, the very symbols of dawggone good football.

This first day of autumn — forget the calendar, the hoghide is in the air, so it must be fall - was gloriously familiar in its wonders, even in the way it touched a new kid in town, a freshman out of Texas, 18 years old, a young man who drove up from Houston only a month ago to play him some dawggone Georgia football between the hedges and in front of 75,000 people.

"I've never see that many people at a ball game," said Rodney Hampton, a tailback out of Houston's Kashmere High. "The most ever for our games was 20,000." Hampton speaks in a voice so soft it floats. You lean forward to hear him say about his first college game, "I had butterflies. Butterflies all inside my body."

Did he sleep the night before? "A couple hours' sleep."

Get up a lot? "Dreamin' about the

What did he dream? "That I went in

and did a pretty good job." No touchdown in his dreams? "No.

Dave Kindred

Truth outran dreams for Rodney Hampton this first day of autumn.

The first time he touched the football in a college game - late in the third quarter, Georgia leading only 16-14 -Hampton ran for 11 yards at right end. The next time, he made what a coach called "the big play of the game," an 11yard pass reception on third-and-five at Virginia's 46-yard line.

The third time he had the ball, taking it on a pitch from quarterback James Jackson, Hampton ran 21 yards for a touchdown. Offensive coordinator George Haffner said, "He read the first blocks well, he accelerated, then he settled, then he broke to the sidelines and, zooooom, he put it in the end zone"

This is to be Lars Tate's year as Georgia's tailback, the latest stud in the line of succession from Herschel Walker. Tate is 6-foot-2, 208, a pro prospect. He ran for 218 yards against Virginia with seven runs of 11 yards or longer, the longest a 44-yard demonstration of strength and quickness.

Even in the glare of such brilliance, Rodney Hampton's work could not go unnoticed. He carried six times for 70 yards, and the numbers only suggest how good he was.

Listen to James Jackson, who noticed no butterflies fluttering around Hampton: "When I looked into his eyes as he came in the huddle, it only looked like he wanted the ball. He didn't seem to be the typical, nervous freshman. He's going to be a great back because he's real quick and

shifty, but it you get head up with him, he'll drop a shoulder and run you over."

Then Jackson announced, for those in Dawgdom who have wondered about it, "We don't have 'a running back problem.' "

With three fullbacks so evenly matched he can't pick the best, and with Hampton there to back up Tate, Vince Dooley fashioned a running game Saturday that gained 394 yards. As for Hampton, Dooley said, "This was confirmation of practice," where Hampton had run well, and the coach added, "He had the advantage of being in the game late, when Virginia was getting tired, but this shows he could help us at No. 2 tailback, where we desperately need help."

"Rodney and James (Jackson) made the big play of the game," said Haffner, the offensive coordinator. He meant the 11-yard pass play on third down when Georgia led only 16-14 and hadn't yet made a long touchdown drive. "Rodney made his block and then crossed the middle. James found him in there and then Rodney turned it upfield and ran past a couple of people. That gave us a little confidence we'd been lacking."

Next time he touched the ball, Hampton produced his 21-yard touchdown run. When someone asked how the play looked to him, Hampton said softly, "Great, fantastic. I got the ball and I broke loose. The offensive line made great blocks. I felt free. So I just went on from there."

A Texan, the young man might have gone to school out West. Hampton quickly ruled out the Southwest Conference misfits. It came down to Oklahoma or Georgia, the veer or the I-formation, one place with a stampede of running backs or one with room for a freshman.

"How'd you know," a man wondered, "that Georgia ran the 'I'?"

The questions some people ask. Rodney Hampton smiled and said the name of a man who also scored for Georgia in the first game he ever played, "Herschel



If Austin can return, why not Herschel?

Powerful though he is, Lars Tate isn't invulnerable. Georgia's coaches worry that their estimable tailback may get

Worry not, Bulldogs. There's depth

In Dallas.

There's this tailback, see. He's pretty good. He played at Georgia a while back. He stayed three seasons. Then he left. His name's Herschel.

Here's what Georgia does: It gets Herschel to say he's sorry for signing a USFL contract, sorry for lying about it, sorry for leaving, sorry for getting drafted by the Cowboys, sorry for every single thing he's done since February '83. He gives back a little money, eats a little crow. Then he asks the NCAA to let him play college football again.

Why not? He's got a season left. He likes the school. He gave \$100,000 to help build Butts-Mehre, the opulent Dawg Mahal. (Georgia might have to return that - schools aren't supposed to solicit donations from athletes - but what's a hundred grand when you're getting Herschel back?) He hustles to Athens, enrolls in school — there's plenty of time; classes don't begin until Sept. 21 - and shares his position with Lars Tate instead of Tony Dorsett. Everybody's happy.

And never mind that he didn't complete his four years of eligibility in the required five years. As we know, the NCAA is in a forgiving mood. It granted Teryl Austin, the Pitt defender, another year. No matter that he took money from Norby Walters and Lloyd Bloom, those agents provocateurs. He apologized. He refunded the cash. So he's eligible again.

Hey, Alabama even holds out hope of amnesty for Derrick McKey, the SEC's basketball player of the year. So what if he took Walters-Bloom money in January and played maybe 20 games afterward? So what if he repeatedly denied that he'd gotten a dime, finally admitting it just in time to enter the NBA draft? So what if he hit up Norman Blass, yet another agent, for enough jack to buy a nice new Mercedes? Poor Derrick never meant to do any of it.

Says Blass: "It was Derrick's intention to remain in school. Then the agent thing broke and he was ruled ineligible and obviously there was no alternative but to apply for the NBA draft. The sad part is if we had known ... he would have returned to Alabama. Derrick never would have applied for the draft, left his name in, borrowed the money or bought the car if he had not been fully led to believe there was no chance for reinstate-

Got that? A begat B begat C begat Z. Herschel could say the same. Had Herschel known the NCAA wouldn't honor its bylaws, he could've handed J. Walter Duncan his money, torn up the contract and played merrily on, a Bulldog still. The "sad part" is that Herschel figured the NCAA would stick to its principles. Let that be a lesson: Never overesti-

mate the NCAA.

The NCAA says it took pity on Teryl Austin because he told the truth. Oh, he broke the rules, but at least he didn't lie about it. Guess that makes a difference. Cheat, get caught, 'fess up, and you're clean. No prob.

Such a joke. Rules are rules are rules. If Teryl Austin didn't know taking Walters-Bloom money was wrong, he's so thick he shouldn't be in college. If Alabama truly believes that Derrick McKey



AGENT PROVOCATEUR? Agent

should be granted another year of eligibility, then all its brave talk of hiring Bill Curry to win with honor rings hollow.

Derrick McKey is a professional. New he hasn't yet signed an NBA contract, but that cuts no ice. According to the NCAA manual, he's a pro, has been since January. He took money. He retained an agent. He kept playing. Alabama now feels it's entitled to the \$633,616 it earned by participating in the NCAA tournament. So what if both McKey and Terry Coner, another Walters-Bloom client, were technically ineligible? Nobody's enforcing anything these days.

It wasn't always thus. The NCAA, doesn't recognize the second- and thirdplace finishers in the '71 tournament. Villanova had to refund its money and its runner-up plaque after discovering that Howard Porter had signed with an agent. Said Steve Sloan, Alabama's AD: "The Villanova case was one instance in one year." Wrong. That same year, Western Kentucky saw its Final Four participation struck from the records. Seems Jim McDaniels had himself an agent, too.

"We're under a different set of circumstances than what's occurred in the past," Sloan said. "This is epidemic proportions." And that makes it OK. If everybody flouts the NCAA, fine. But let one (or two) players do it, and the mighty organization vents its wrath.

We live in the age of immunity. Government employees thumb their noses at the U.S. Constitution and are christened heroes. Wall Street arbitrageurs make fortunes off insider trading and get off light because they rat on cronies. Look sorrowful enough, and you can get away with almost anything. Alas, Herschel was ahead of his time.

But you never know. Maybe he could get his USFL contract postdated. Maybe everybody could pretend the USFL never existed. (Who'd know the difference?) Maybe the NCAA would be so kind as to waive its five-years-to-play-four statute. Maybe Herschel can get that year back yet. With the NCAA, never say never.

'Sucker' theory guards NFL owners in case of strike

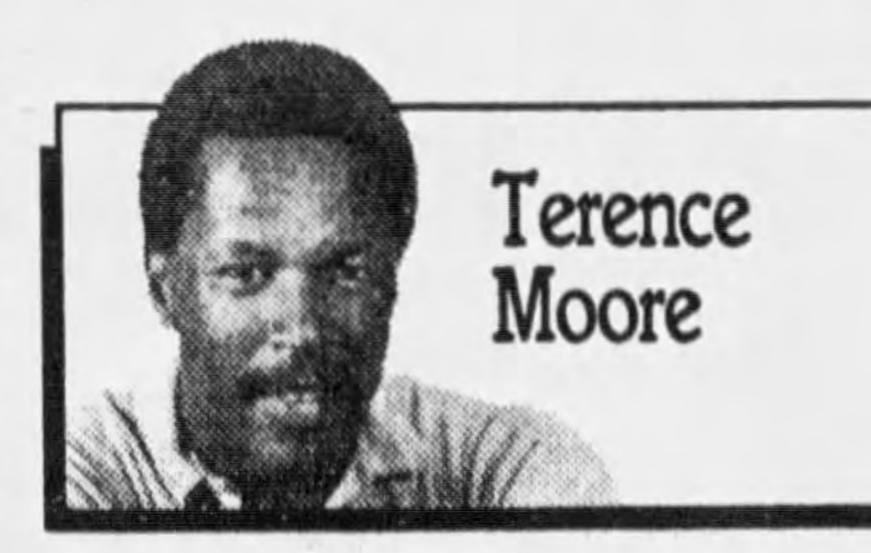
Once again, NFL owners are testing the theory that a sucker is born every millisecond. If the NFL players association strikes this month, the owners have from the television networks this season by fielding teams of training-camp rejects. The networks will receive rebates only if ratings drop significantly, but there is little chance of that. (See theory above.)

Americans will accept anything related to the game Pete Rozelle invented 2,000 centuries ago. There was public sniping at the NFL in 1982 but not because of the players' 57-day walkout. The public fumed because the walkout forced the networks to show Division III football and reruns of reruns.

This time, the owners have a plan. They are building emergency teams in the shadows by offering \$1,000 to players released during training camp. Will there be a strike? Probably. As former Cincinnati tight end Bob Trumpy says, "It's the only way the players union can justify its exis-

The union is asking for something unrestricted free agency - that the owners will allow only when December immediately follows April. Would owners suffer conspired to collect their \$476 million financially during a strike? Hardly. Consider television ratings during the 1987 exhibition season have been among the highest ever. Consider, too, preseason football isn't that much better than these pickup games proposed by the owners.

This willingness of NFL owners to stuff their wallets by selling an inferior product to the masses is typical. As those who run the Atlanta Falcons have shown, winning isn't the bottom line for most NFL owners. They make money regardless. Each of the league's 28 teams received a quarter of their \$17 million for the season from the networks earlier this week. Even though the NFL Management Council claims four teams lost money last season (New England, San Francisco, the New York Jets and Los Angeles Raiders), the players association claims all teams made profits. Let's just say no NFL owner filed for bankruptcy.



Anyway, Al Davis of the Raiders is a rarity. He is an NFL owner who wants to win. He accepts renegades who have talent and a parole. He pays them well. The Raiders consistently lead the league in average player salaries, and all those players have done is help Davis win two Super Bowls in the 1980s.

The only other team to do as well during the decade is San Francisco, which is no coincidence. Eddie DeBartolo Jr. wants to win, too. Not only do his 49ers rank with the Raiders among the league's highest-paid players each season, but both teams are annually among the league's lowest in gross profits.

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more than unlock your stadium gates. The ers, the lower your profits. Washington Redskins have won more There are exceptions. Patrick Bowgames during the decade than any other len's Denver Broncos finished among the NFL team, but their annual gross profits NFL leaders in gross profits last season have barely reached \$1 million. Then with high-salaried players who reached there are the Colts. They've won only 12 the Super Bowl. The Broncos have one of games since moving from Baltimore to In- the league's largest stadiums (76,274 dianapolis before the 1984 season, but they've averaged more than \$10 million in gross profits during that time, more than anybody in the league.

According to information from the players union, San Diego, Detroit and Philadelphia were among the league's gross profit leaders last season, with an average of \$7 million and with a composite record of 14-23-1. Then there were San Francisco, Los Angeles (Raiders) and Washington. They ranked near the league's bottom in gross profits.

Here is the awful truth: Most NFL owners would like to win. If they make the playoffs, that's fine. If they don't reach the league's championship game,

Unless you're an NFL owner who that's better. The more you win, the more wants to win, there is little incentive to do you pay players. The more you pay play-

seats), and with luxury boxes, and with eternal sellouts, and with Bowlen receiving much of the stadium's concessions, the Broncos are as healthy financially as the Falcons are sickly.

Yes, the Falcons owners are exceptions to the awful truth, despite having one of the league's smallest payrolls. They also have one of the league's smallest stadiums (59,643). In addition, they have no luxury boxes, no percentage of the concessions, no chance to rank among the league leaders in annual gross profits. So the Falcons owners want a new stadium. They haven't said much about wanting a Super Bowl team these days. Then again, they would like to win.

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