Sports

SECTION C

THE ATLANTA CONSTITUTION

FRIDAY, MARCH 11, 1988

Abernethy juror says Porter could have been convicted, too

By Chris Mortensen Staff Writer

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At least one member of the Alabama jury that last week convicted former agent Jim Abernethy of tampering with a sports event felt Auburn football player Kevin Porter could have been tried and convicted on the same charge.

"When it came right down to it, I felt Kevin Porter was just as responsible as Abernethy," said James Hildreth, one of two jurors who agreed Thursday to discuss the case publicly for the first time. "I felt Kevin had paid a penalty, having to sit out the Sugar Bowl. But he didn't pay very much. He should have been ineligible to play the whole season, and he missed just one game, and he put the university in jeopardy, as Abernethy did."

Abernethy was found guilty by a Lee County jury of the tampering charge for signing Porter to a representation contract on Aug. 3, 1987, one month prior to the start of the defensive back's senior season at Auburn.

Porter was not charged because he was a "victim of the crime," according to Alabama assistant attorney general Don Valeska.

The eight-woman, four-man jury acquitted Abernethy on charges of commercial bribery and deceptive trade practices. On the tampering conviction, Aber-

nethy received the maximum sentence - one year in jail and a \$2,000 fine — but he has filed an appeal.

"I wouldn't be surprised if he won on appeal," said another juror, Judy Thompson of Auburn. "It wouldn't hurt my feelings. I felt strongly that he was guilty on the one count, but I was not outraged at what he did."

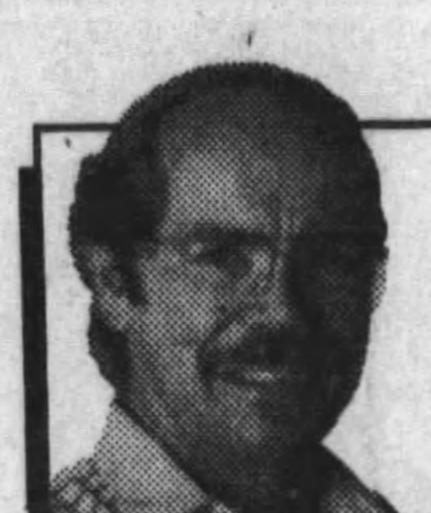
Thompson said she did not think Porter should have been prosecuted because he testified that his mother was under financial duress. However, she said, "There was one juror who wondered exactly where the money went."

Nine other jurors reached by telephone this week declined to discuss the case with a reporter, and one could not be reached. One juror, Jane Baker, whose husband is an Auburn University chemistry professor, said, "The judge gave us very strict instructions not to talk." Asked what the judge said specifically, Baker replied, "Well, you had to be looking at his eyes to knowwhat he meant."

The jurors had refused to discuss the case with the media after returning their verdicts last week.

Hildreth, of Smith, Ala., and Thompson said Abernethy's unshaven appearance did not project a good image in court. Valeska had pointed his finger at Abernethy in his closing argument and implored the jury to

See JURY, Page 8C



Spring a road to kid in us

The Wilson A-2000 sits on my desk. It's to the left of a dictionary and it's raised up on a box. It sits above a rat's nest of correspondence, the debris of middle age.

By computer-driven letter, the IRS announces it wants more blood from this turnip. Public television rattles its tin cup. The bank needs \$15 to stop payment on a check lost in the mail. "I'm so down," an old friend in Washington writes, "I don't know whether to kill myself or go bowling." The morning mail brings a pamphlet from Muhammad Ali asking, "Is Jesus Really God?"

I didn't know why I put the A-2000 so prominently on my desk. I just wanted it there. That's all I knew.

Anarchy was afoot in my study. Books gathered in dark corners to whisper of revolt. Newspapers began to slide down from the couch, moving like a lava flow toward my feet. Each morning the crowd grew larger. Little leftist magazines crept in during the night. When I heard the duck-boot clomp-clomp of L.L. Bean catalogues, I knew if I didn't clean up the place soon, the study would be lost forever.

I found the A-2000 in a cardboard box under a table behind a stack of Sports Illustrated magazines. The April 2, 1962, issue had a cover portrait of the young Arnold Palmer, lean and handsome, all whipcord and steel. Palmer radiated determination under a headline, "The Masters." (He would win it a third time, and would win, though you wouldn't have believed it then, only one more major championship in his career.)

It was a year of insults and 'shamateurism'

So long ago, 26 years. What else happened that

"The Deadly Insult" told us that welterweight champion Emile Griffith beat Benny Paret to death the day after Paret uttered a homosexual epithet. The Yankees' home run gods, Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris, made a movie for kids. A tennis bigwig called for an end to "shamateurism."

A small news item reported, "Frank Gifford, who suffered severe head injuries in 1960, has received medical clearance and will play next season for the New York Giants, but as a flanker back or flanker end, not as a running back."

On page 16, with baseball's spring training done, we were promised, "Big Year for Rookies." We met four phee-noms, eager and fresh-faced fellows whose names we didn't know then and are all but forgotten now: Ray Washburn and Ted Savage, Larry Burright and Phil Linz (who would fight another rookie, Tom Tresh, for the Yankee shortstop job until Tony Kubek finished Army duty; Tresh, then 23, said, "I just can't remember the time when I didn't

have a baseball in my hands.") That year, 1962, I bought the Wilson A-2000 for \$35, a lot of money for a college kid making \$1.25 an hour as a part-time sportswriter.

Glove was great, but the body didn't match

But my high school baseball coach, Eldridge (Doc) Kinsey, once said, "If you can't play, at least look like a player."

So I bent my cap bill just right. I wore my uniform pants rolled just below the knee (in the fashion of Mantle, whose picture was on my bedroom wall). I saved a week's pay to buy the Wilson A-2000, the best baseball glove ever made, the idea being that maybe I could be one of those fresh-faced rookies someday.

As it turned out, the only thing that stood between me and rookie stardom in the major leagues was talent. The glove was fine. The A-2000 was great. But the body. The body couldn't do the job.

My college coach said of his favorite slowfooted second sacker, "Kindred knows the game as well as Casey Stengel — and he plays like he's 75,

Ray Washburn became the best of those four 1962 rookies. He pitched 10 big-league seasons, winning 14 games one year, working in three World Series. Ted Savage in nine years hit over .227 only twice, his best .279. Larry Burright lasted two seasons with the Dodgers, .205 lifetime. We remember, Phil Linz not so much as a seven-year utility man with the Yankees as the music man who played a harmonica on the team bus and caused manager Yogi Berra to say, "Who's whistling back there?"

It's springtime. It's baseball time. Everyone's a

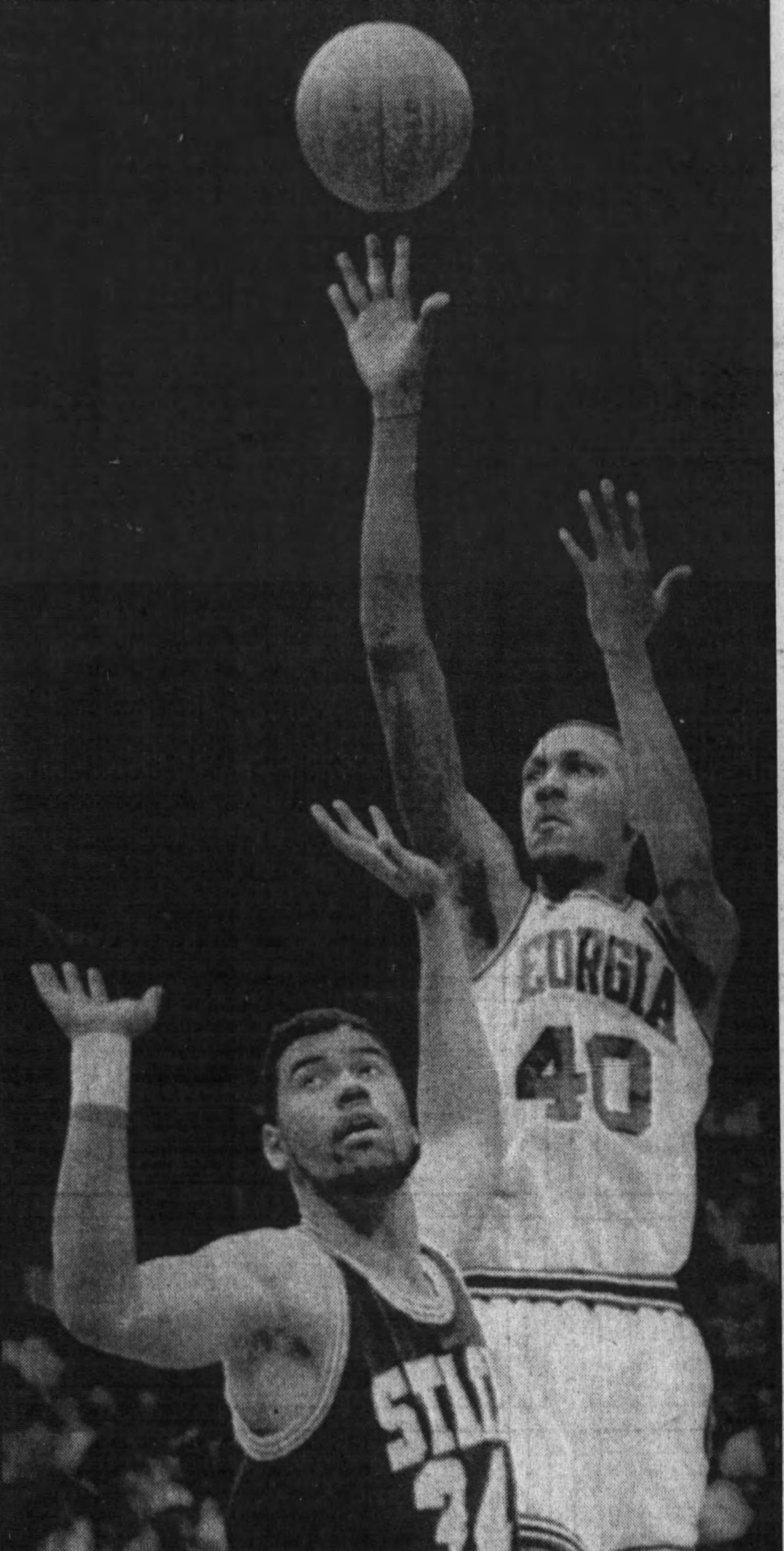
kid again.

I take a look at the A-2000 on my desk. It's 26 years old now and it's beautiful. The leather is a golden color under a patina of infield dirt. You should slide your hand into the glove. To feel the A-2000, still soft after all this time, is to imagine it carrying you toward a sharply hit ground ball behind second base.

No wonder I keep the glove where I can see it

every day.

Georgia tunes up 64-43



CALVIN CRUCE/Staff

Georgia's Willie Anderson takes shot over Mississippi State's Chancellor Nichols during Thursday's game.

By Thomas O'Toole Staff Writer

BATON ROUGE, La. — That Georgia won its first-round game in the Southeastern Conference tournament Thursday night was only part of the reason the Bulldogs celebrated. -

They were just as pleased by how they won it.

With senior Willie Anderson scoring 22 points and a 2-3 zone defense wreaking havoc in the second half, the Bulldogs efficiently dismantled Mississippi State 64-43 at LSU's Assembly Center.

"This was a perfect game for us," said center Alec Kessler. "It wasn't very fast. It wasn't emotionally draining. I think we're in pretty good shape."

The seventh-seeded Bulldogs had hoped to avoid an exhausting SEC tournament

■ When: Continues through

Sunday ■ Where: Baton Rouge, La. ■ Thursday's results: Ole

Miss 64, Alabama 59 (OT); Georgia 64, Miss. State 43 Friday's games: 1 p.m. - LSU vs. Vanderbilt; 3:30

p.m. - Florida vs. Tennessee; 8 p.m. - Kentucky vs. Ole Miss; 10:30 p.m. - Auburn vs. Georgia

battle in the opening round because of depth problems and the potential of playing four games in four days.

See GEORGIA, Page 11C

Tide's off year ended by Rebs 64-59 in overtime

By David Davidson College Editor

BATON ROUGE, La. — It was an ignoble ending to a season that had an ignoble beginning a year

Alabama's basketball season, which crashed 12 months ago when center Derrick McKey — the SEC's 1987 player of the year — was declared ineligible after signing a contract with agent Norby Walters in violation of NCAA rules, officially ended here Thursday night with a 64-59 overtime loss to Ole Miss in the opening game of the SEC basketball tournament.

Bama's 14-17 record is the first

losing season for coach Wimp Sanderson on either the high-school or college level, and for the first time since 1981 the Crimson Tide won't participate in the NCAA tournament. "I apologize for the kind of year

we've had," Sanderson said. "It's been hard on all of us.

"It wasn't a very pretty game," Sanderson said. "We didn't deserve to win it. I have no excuses. I'm responsible, and I did a terrible job. The players were even worse."

Ole Miss won after trailing by nine points with three minutes re-

See OLE MISS, Page 11C

ACC tournament trouble could strike UNC again

Complete coverage, Page 10C By Thomas Stinson Staff Writer

GREENSBORO, N.C. - North Carolina basketball has no shortage of traditions.

Like the team meeting/love-in at center court after each victory of consequence.

Like the ambush halfcourt trap. Like the senior-as-deity syndrome. How else did Timo Makkonen end up on the cover of the team's 1984 media guide?

Like foregoing the customary practice session at the Atlantic Coast Conference tournament site the day before the shindig starts so everyone can go to class.

And like ... nearly always failing to win the tournament.

ACC tournament When: Today through Sun.

■ Where: Greensboro, N.C. Friday's games: Noon -Wake Forest vs. N. Carolina; 2 p.m. — Georgia Tech vs. Maryland; 7 p.m. - Clemson vs. N.C. State; 9 p.m. -

Virginia vs. Duke. ■TV — All games on Channel 46. Check local listings.

The ACC tournament, the treacherous shoal that for 34 years has menaced so many dreadnaughts

See ACC, Page 10C

1989 Tyson match in Holyfield plans

Heavyweight tuneups likely against Tillis and Thomas

> By Dave Kindred Staff Writer

If Evander Holyfield and Mike Tyson continue beating up people, they'll fight for the heavyweight championship, possibly in February or March of next year, with Holyfield taking home \$10 million.

For the first time after months of

speculation, Holyfield now says a Tyson fight is on his schedule. And Holyfield's manager, Atlanta businessman Ken Sanders, said, "Evander will be guaranteed \$10 million with a \$20-million return-match guarantee if he beats Tyson."

Tyson's managers, Bill Cayton and Jimmy Jacobs, could not be reached for comment. As recently as last month, Cayton said that aside from Michael Spinks, Holyfield is the primary challenger for Tyson's title and the only other fighter whose marquee value is strong enough

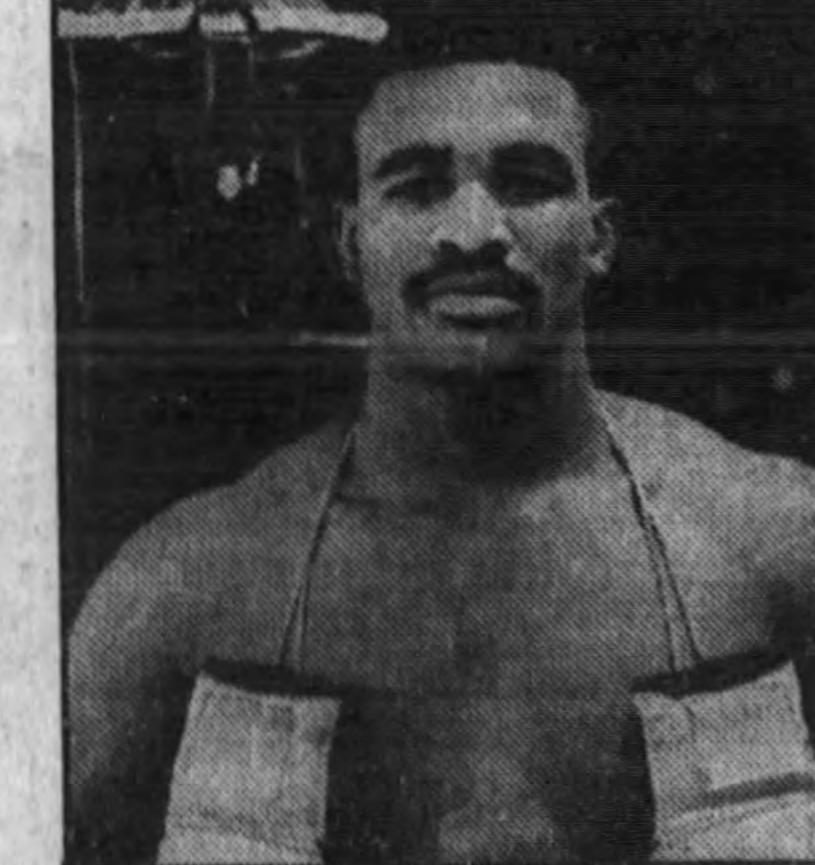
that a fight could be sold to closed-circuit television.

Sanders said, "I'd be lying if I said the

idea of Evander fighting Tyson for \$10 million didn't make me anxious to see it happen. But not to the point of making mistakes. We're going to do what's best for Evander. We wouldn't fight Tyson tomorrow for \$10 million. But in a year, yes."

Holyfield first must defend his world cruiserweight championship against Car-

See FIGHT, Page 8C



Evander Holyfield

Jury

From Page 1C

"take a good look at this man." "To be honest, it bothered me

that he wasn't clean shaven," said Hildreth. "But by the end of the (two-day) trial, I convinced myself that I could not let something like that influence my decision, and it did not."

Thompson said, "I thought he looked nice, but it probably had a negative effect on some of the older jurors by being unshaven. He needed to put his best foot forward. One of the other lady jurors said something about that."

Thompson, an insurance agent, said she had no trouble applying the sports tampering law to Abernethy's signing of Porter.

The 11-year-old law reads: "A person commits the crime of tampering with a sports contest if, with intent to influence the outcome of a sports contest, he:

"(1) Tampers with any sports participant or sports official, or with any animal, equipment or other thing involved in the conduct or operation of a sports contest, in a manner contrary to the rules and usages purporting to govern the sports contest in question; or,

"(2) Substitutes a sports participant, animal, equipment or other thing involved in the conduct or operation of a sports contest, for the genuine person, animal or thing."

Thompson said the jury understood that Abernethy was the first person who had been charged with violating the tampering law. "That's not a factor," she said. "There's always a first."

Thompson said she took a vocal role in the jury room after the first vote on the tampering charge produced seven jurors in favor of conviction and five for acquittal. She said the five people who voted for acquittal expressed doubt as to whether Abernethy intended to commit the crime.

"But I told them, 'They intended

to sign the contract; they knew all the possibilities, all the potential outcomes of that action, that Kevin Porter should have been ineligible from that point on," said Thompson. "It did affect the outcome (of games). Some people (jurors) thought Mr. Abernethy had Kevin's best interests at heart. But I said, 'When he was ready to blow the whistle, did he have Kevin's best interests at heart? Did he call Kevin and warn him?'

"And, clearly, he affected the outcome of the Sugar Bowl by going public with his actions after assuring Kevin Porter it would remain a Kevin Porter

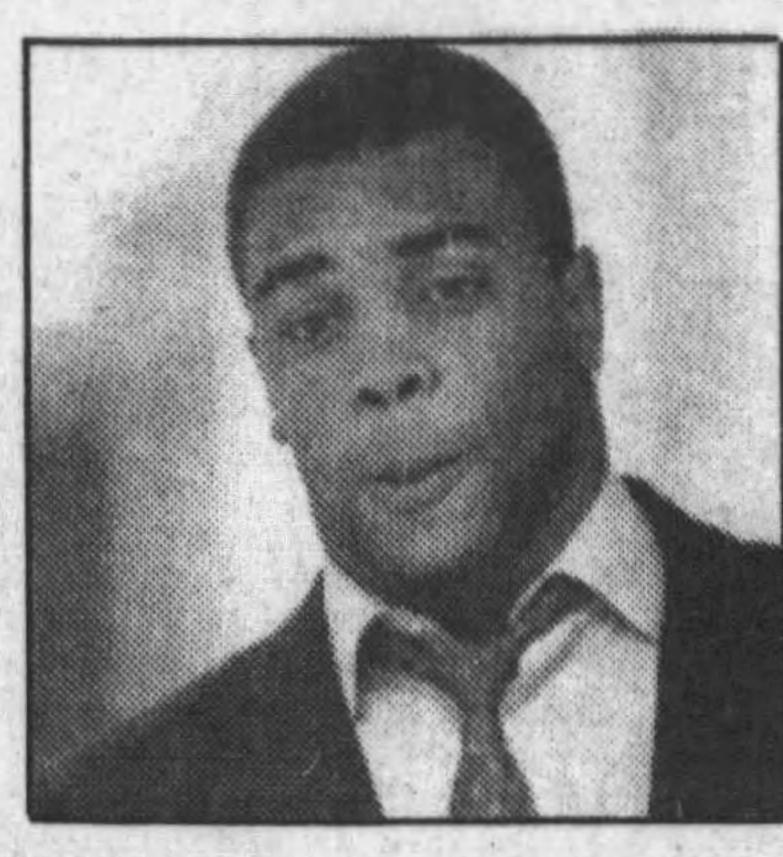
Porter testified that Abernethy told him when they signed the contract in the agent's Buckhead office that he would not reveal the agreement, which both knew was a violation of NCAA rules. With two athletes — Riccardo Ingram of Georgia Tech and Tony Jeffery of TCU — already exposed and losing eligibility, Abernethy came forward in an Atlanta Journal-Constitution story on Dec. 15, detailing his dealings with several college athletes, and Porter was promptly declared ineligible

for the Sugar Bowl. After more discussion, the jury took another vote, which wound up 11-1 in favor of conviction. The lone holdout was an Auburn graduate assistant teacher, said Thompson; he was identified by attorneys as Herman Burkett, who could not be reached for comment.

"His basic hangup at that point was that if Abernethy had not come forward, nobody would have known the difference and everything would have been OK," said Thompson. " asked him, 'Are you saying if he didn't get caught, it would have been OK?"

The jurors took a short break, she said, and returned later with a unanimous verdict after 21/2 hours of deliberation.

Thompson said the jury acquitted Abernethy on the commercial bribery and deceptive trade practice charges because "we did not see how they fit." However, she said the commercial bribery law could



have fit if the state had made a better argument that Porter was indeed an employee of the university.

Thompson said she did not vehemently argue the employee matter because she feared Auburn's football program possibly could have been penalized further since Porter testified that he had told his roommate, Tracy Rocker, of his relationship with Abernethy.

Thompson said jurors were confused on how to interpret \$100 bonuses Abernethy promised to pay Porter for each interception. Porter, who testified he received a total of \$3,800 from Abernethy, did not make an interception until after the business in November.

"Some jurors thought that a \$100 bonus was not a detriment to Porter or the school," said Thompson. "But I told everyone, 'You're looking at it from the Auburn bench. There's another university that plays football in this state. How would Alabama feel knowing that Porter was getting paid an extra hundred dollars to make interceptions in the Auburn-Alabama

The Alabama attorney general's office will try agents Norby Walters and Lloyd Bloom on the same three charges for their dealings with former University of Alabama basketball player Derrick McKey. Wa and Bloom are scheduled to be arraigned Wednesday in Tuscaloosa; trial date probably will be set at

Vermeil apparently out at CBS

Former Philadelphia Eagles coach Dick Vermell is apparently on the way out as a football analyst at

Vermeil, whose contract has expired, has been offered only a partial schedule for the upcoming sea-

"About the only way it could be interpreted is that people don't think he's making any progress," said CBS spokesman Mark Carlson.

Vermeil worked 14 NFL games and several college games last season. In the new proposal, the NFL workload would be cut in half, and he would likely be out of the college picture entirely.

"A reduced concept is not really acceptable," said Vermeil's agent, Bob Goldy. "It comes as a surprise. He's held in high regard by the CBS people, so there's no personal aspect to the decision."

Vermeil is visiting his daughter in England and has been unavailable for comment.

"Obviously, it's work-related, and you're dealing with a subjective evaluation," Goldy added. "Very few people in the industry have a real answer. I'm at a loss to understand it, although I've heard it's been said he overprepares and overworks. But that's a curable disease."

Goldy said talks are continuing with CBS, and communication has also begun with ABC, NBC and ESPN. "Right now, it's not a hairyscary thing where we're under a deadline and have to do something," said Goldy. "There are other alternatives, including the possibility of returning to coaching."

Officials of ABC, NBC and ESPN indicated there's not a lot of interest in Vermeil at this time.

Down the road, the story could be different, especially at NBC. Its top analyst, Merlin Olsen, has gotten off to an encouraging start with his new series, "Aaron's Way," and Olsen has said if the program is renewed for next season, he will work NFL games only during the Summer Olympics (Sept. 15-Oct. 4).

DUNKING, COLLEGE-STYLE: With such a heavy emphasis on college basketball this weekend, it's not surprising someone has come up with a new gimmick. ABC is the guilty party this time.

During halftime of the network's coverage Sunday of the Pacific-10 Conference tournament final (4 p.m., Channel 2), it is scheduled to present the first annual college bas-

Each participating school submitted a tape of dunks by its players during the course of a game. According to ABC officials, there were 150 nominations, which were pared to 50 by producers. The final 10 were judged by commentators Dick Vitale, Joe B. Hall and Cheryl Miller and will be presented on the tele-



* * *

came up with the idea of doing a

live show on the announcement of

the NCAA Tournament pairings

(Sunday, 5:30 p.m.) six years ago.

the network had no idea it would

now," says CBS announcer Brent

Musburger. "And the last 10 teams

this year will be especially tough to

CBS analyst Billy Packer says, "I

honestly believe there are 50 teams

out of 64 that can win at least one

"People can't wait to see i

become such a big deal.

PEACHY PAIRINGS: When CBS

game, meaning you can count out only 14 teams. Before, you could count out about half the teams."

BITS AND PIECES: The reason Barry Tompkins left HBO Sports was because he wanted to do college football and basketball, and HBO had an exclusivity clause in his contract preventing him from appearing on any other cable network. Tompkins has sent out feelers to TBS and ESPN, but the reception has been lukewarm at best. . . . The versatility award goes to announcer Mary Albert. In a two-week period from March 6-20, Albert will have worked the Michael Olajide-Iran Barkley fight, a Rangers hockey game, a Knicks basketball game, an SEC college basketball semifinal and a Mets-Dodgers exhibition baseball game.





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Fight

From Page 1C

los DeLeon on April 9 in Las Vegas. Then, Holyfield said this week from his training camp in Houston, he will move into the heavyweight division, most likely to fight James "Quick" Tillis and former heavyweight champion Pinklon Thomas.

Spokesperson Kathy Duva of Main Events, Inc., Holyfield's fight promoters, said, "The Tyson fight will be sometime next year. It could be February or March, but it also might end up being later. If we have to do it in May, because that's when the Tyson people want it, we'll do it in May. We're not going to insult or enrage them over any time frame."

Before getting to Holyfield, Tyson may have four fights. The undefeated 22-year-old slugger meets Tony Tubbs March 21 in Tokyo. On

June 27, it's Michael Spinks.

"I feel good about the Tyson situation," said Holyfield, 25, undefeated in 17 professional fights. "We * can set it up this way in advance, and I still have a chance to fight my fights. I don't have to stay in the closet waiting until Tyson's ready to fight me. People might say, 'Why take a chance and fight anybody, why not just wait for Tyson?' The way I look at, if I can't beat those guys, I don't deserve to fight Tyson."

"Right now, I'm 200 pounds," Holyfield said. "I've got to get down to 195 for DeLeon. But with the conditioning and weight-lifting program I'm on, it shouldn't be any problem being 203, 205. That's big enough. I'll be just as quick as ever, and I'll be stronger."

Holyfield says a \$10-million payday promised a year in advance will not cause him to overlook DeLeon, Tillis or Thomas.

"That's because I don't look at it

as \$10 million. I look at it that by beating Tyson I could make even more money," Holyfield said. "So I can't afford any mistakes between now and then. Especially with somebody like 'Quick' Tillis. He's one of the only fighters who ever fought back against Tyson [losing a decision in 1986, but becoming the first man Tyson couldn't knock out]. Tillis is a proven heavyweight, 215, 220, and the guy is good. People will be looking at that fight to ask, 'What can Holyfield do with a heavy-

"It sounds real stupid to say it, but \$10 million wouldn't be enough money if I didn't think Evander could beat Tyson," Sanders said. "If thought Tyson would do to him what he did to Tyrell Biggs [a thirdround knockout], \$10 million is not enough money. But Evander can beat Tyson. And Evander's a \$250million fighter — he can make that much money in his career - if he's the heavyweight champion."

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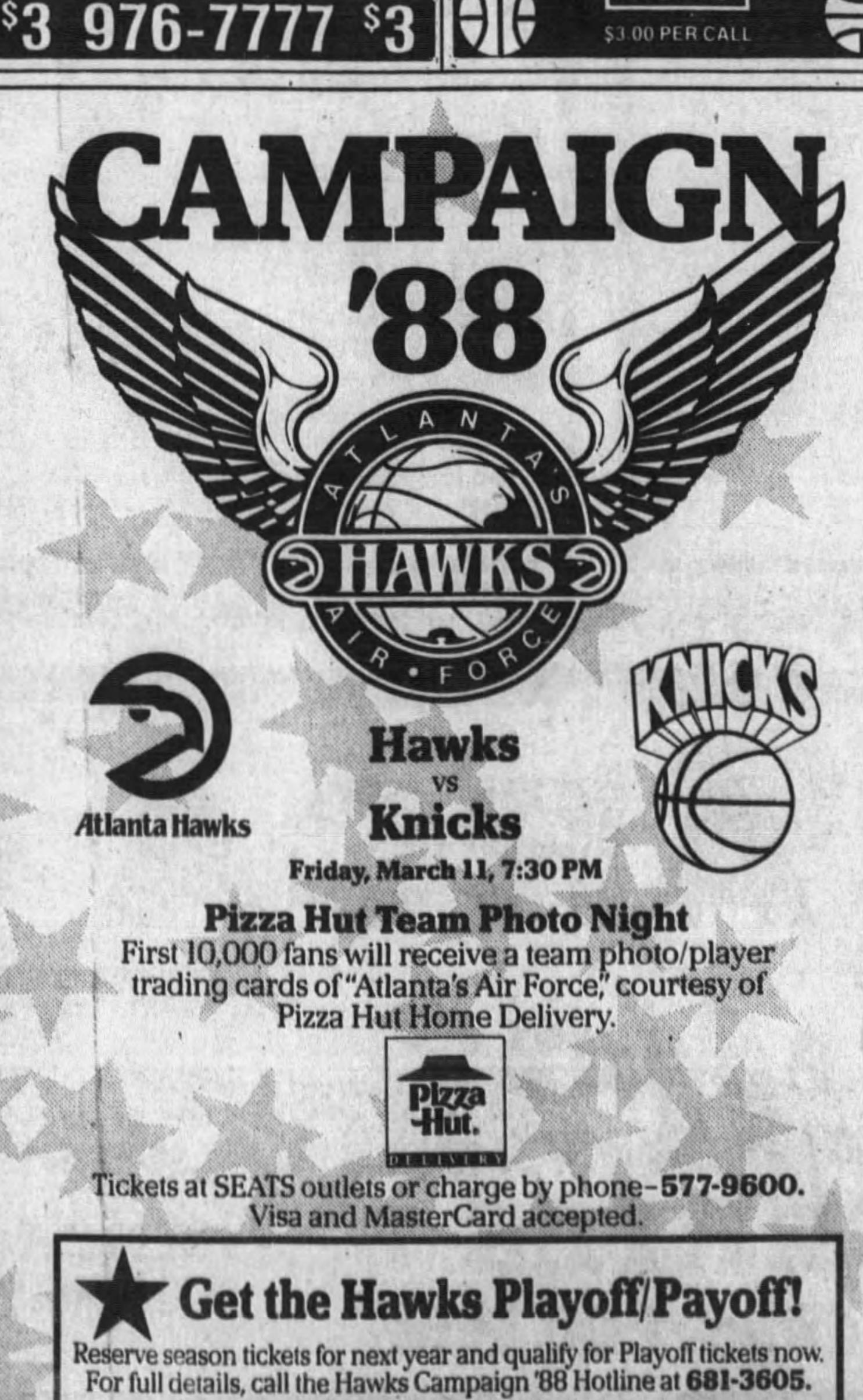
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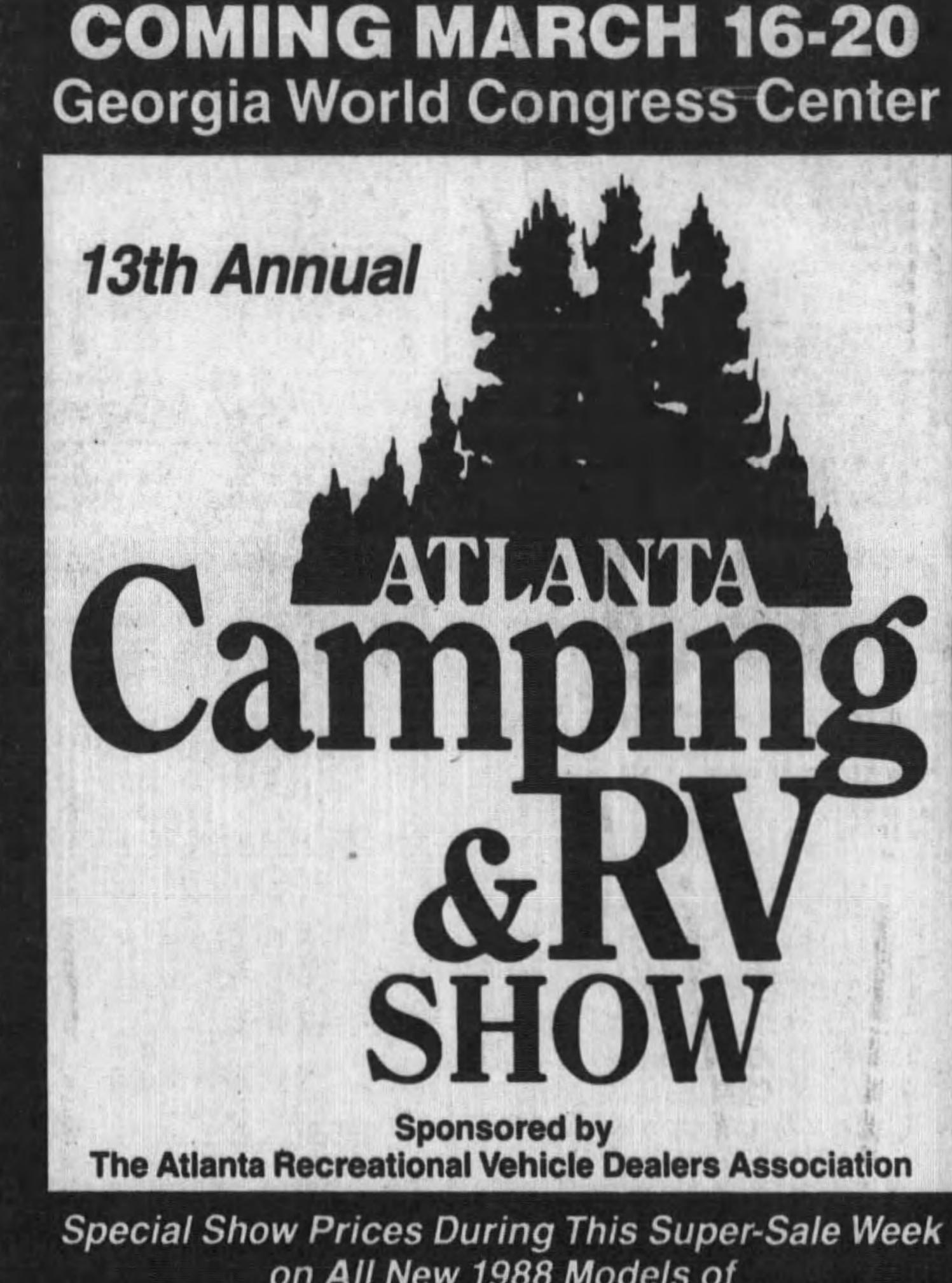
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