

Auburn Football News: 5-3-2024

Few excuses remain for Auburn's passing game after offseason overhaul:

<https://247sports.com/college/auburn/article/auburn-football-transfer-portal-quarterback-hugh-freeze-tigers-2024-offense-231338669/>

Biggest remaining needs for Auburn football as spring portal window closes:

<https://sports.yahoo.com/biggest-remaining-needs-auburn-football-092254754.html>

How a bit of urgency has helped Hugh Freeze and Auburn's approach to the transfer portal:

<https://www.al.com/auburnfootball/2024/05/how-a-bit-of-urgency-has-helped-hugh-freeze-and-auburns-approach-to-the-transfer-portal.html>

Who is coming, who is going from Auburn's wide receiver room?:

<https://www.al.com/auburnfootball/2024/05/who-is-coming-who-is-going-from-auburns-wide-receiver-room.html>

Auburn, Freeze try to climb the mountain again:

<https://247sports.com/college/auburn/article/auburn-football-hugh-freeze-pat-dye-gene-chizik-gus-malzahn-231299594/>

Tracking the transfers 5/1:

<https://auburn.rivals.com/news/tracking-the-transfers-5-1-auburn-tigers-football-portal>

Transfer LB: Auburn 'great place to be':

<https://auburn.rivals.com/news/transfer-lb-auburn-great-place-to-be-tigers-football-recruiting>

Transfer Defensive Back Sets Official Visit Dates To Auburn:

<https://www.si.com/college/auburn/transfer-cornerback-sets-official-visit-jayvion-cole>

Auburn Coach Visits Elite EDGE Recruit:

<https://www.si.com/college/auburn/auburn-recruiting-hezekiah-harris-jemison-josh-aldrige>

Few excuses remain for Auburn's passing game after offseason overhaul

By Nathan King

Heading into the summer, Hugh Freeze's passing game at Auburn is now almost entirely made up of players he's brought to the program.

With the transfer portal coming to a close, Auburn's sizable renovations at wide receiver appear to have settled in place for the offseason. Koy Moore entered the portal this week, after Jay Fair also did so late last month. The only returning players in the receiving corps from last season are Camden Brown and Caleb Burton III, who combined for 26 catches and 331 yards.

And with Moore's departure, Brown is the only Bryan Harsin-era receiver left on the team.

Since the conclusion of the 2023 season alone, Auburn has seen eight scholarship receivers exit — six through the portal and two from exhausted eligibility. The room will be composed of seven newcomers next season — three transfers and four freshmen. It's about as close as it gets to completely flipping a position group.

Here's a snapshot of that overhaul, including production from the 2023 season, or relevant recruiting ratings.

RECEIVERS OUT

Koy Moore: 3 rec, 24 yards

Jay Fair: 31 rec, 324 yards, 2 TDs

Ja'Varrius Johnson: 19 rec, 347 yards, 3 TDs

Malcolm Johnson Jr.: 6 rec, 89 yards

Omari Kelly: 2 rec, 45 yards

Jyaire Shorter: 1 rec, 10 yards

Shane Hooks: 10 rec, 144 yards, 2 TDs

Nick Mardner: N/A

RECEIVERS IN

KeAndre Lambert-Smith: 53 rec, 673 yards, 4 TDs

Robert Lewis: 70 rec, 877 yards, 7 TDs

Sam Jackson V: N/A

Cam Coleman: No. 2 WR in 2024 class

Perry Thompson: No. 8 WR in 2024 class

Malcolm Simmons: No. 29 WR in 2024 class

Bryce Cain: No. 30 WR in 2024 class

Lambert-Smith became the ace of Auburn's transfer class, at least on offense, when the Tigers landed his splash commitment last week. A four-year contributor for the Nittany Lions, Lambert-Smith led Penn State in receiving last season. He was set to be the Big Ten's top returning receiver.

Freeze learned his lesson from his first season, when Auburn brought in four transfer receivers, but three were from the Group of Five level. That's by no means a bad strategy, seeing as Auburn snagged Lewis from Georgia State in December. But the trio of Shane Hooks, Jyair Shorter and Nick Mardner struggled to provide much impact in the passing game, with the latter two failing to get on the field with any consistency. Hooks was barely part of the game plan by the end of the season.

Spring practice was a major part of Auburn's game plan for its transfer receivers this time around. Of the four transfers last year, only Mardner went through spring practice — and he dealt with injuries for most of the year. The other three arrived late, along with Payton Thorne, and didn't develop a consistent presence within the offense. Hooks was mostly a non-factor against SEC teams. Burton came on with a couple strong performances late in the season, but it took several games to iron out his role. Shorter got on the field for only 29 snaps in conference play.

There was plenty of prior production from that group at the Group of Five level. But missing spring practice, Freeze believes, was a major hurdle. It was essential for he and Auburn's staff to get Lewis and Jackson on board before the spring this time around.

And in the post-spring practice portal, Freeze didn't want to make the same mistake. It was going to take a bonafide playmaker from the Power Five level to mitigate the difficulties that came with being a late arrival. Enter Lambert-Smith, who brings more than 1,700 career receiving yards and 11 touchdowns at a major program.

Then, of course, there's the "Freeze Four," potentially the most highly decorated crop of receiver recruits the program has ever seen in a single class. It took just a few spring practices for everyone in the building to realize Cam Coleman, Auburn's top-rated offensive recruit of the modern era, could already be the best wideout on the team. He put that absurd talent on display in the A-Day game, but ask any of his teammates, and those types of plays were a dime a dozen on the practice field.

At least on paper, Perry Thompson — a fringe 5-star prospect and the fourth-highest rated receiver to ever sign with Auburn — is the most likely candidate to join Coleman in the main rotation from the freshman class, though there is the caveat of his late arrival in the summer. The speedy Bryce Cain got his feet wet in the spring, and summer arrival Malcolm Simmons could be the most athletic of the bunch.

And Thorne's favorite target from last season — All-SEC tight end Rivaldo Fairweather — is a luxury, as well.

There's no doubt it's an exciting room, clearly with the potential to be Auburn's most gifted crop of receivers in some time. But just how much improvement is realistically needed to pull the Tigers from the depths of the SEC's passing attacks?

The 2023 season was downright putrid in that department. Auburn had the second-least efficient passing game in the conference. Yards per attempt was second-to-last. Yards per game was last. Somehow, some areas were actually improved from the 2022 season, where only six Power Five teams had a worse combined QBR than the Tigers.

The changes at receiver are obviously drastic. Coaching less so, but Freeze will still command a much larger portion of the play-calling and game-planning than he did in 2023. His offensive marriage with then-coordinator Philip Montgomery never clicked, and Freeze himself admitted he wasn't effective in delegating his own responsibilities in terms of recruiting future talent — some of which he now has at his disposal — versus the management of his own team and offense.

Now some of that pressure turns to Thorne. Auburn kept its options open in the first portal window but didn't end up adding a transfer QB. If Freeze's master passing-game plan comes to fruition next season, Thorne will need to take a major step forward from 2023.

Following last month's spring game, after ensuring the Tigers' staff will target another receiver in the portal — which obviously became Lambert-Smith — Freeze essentially issued a challenge to his quarterbacks. He's promised Thorne and crew that there will be more playmakers out wide moving forward. Now it's on the passers — and Freeze, of course — to deliver.

"I think the more talented receivers we get, the better our passing game is going to be," Freeze said. "We'll make sure our quarterbacks understand."

Thorne certainly understands. He threw to NFL receivers at Michigan State, and has referenced that fact many times when discussing Auburn's influx of talent out wide.

Auburn obviously hopes it doesn't all fall on Thorne's shoulders. The improvements at receiver are clear, but it's on Freeze to devise — and later execute — a blueprint to make all the pieces fit together. The goal will be to improve Auburn's offense enough to add at least a couple more wins onto a subpar Year 1 of the Freeze era.

"If you're a quarterback and you've got great guys around you, it makes your job a lot easier," Thorne said after the spring game. "... And it helps to have a good play caller as well. It all goes together. It's all important."

With the grand receiver overhaul seemingly complete, those pieces are in place. How Thorne, Freeze and company make it all work could be argued as the biggest storyline for the Tigers' 2024 season.

Biggest remaining needs for Auburn football as spring portal window closes

By Richard Silva
Montgomery Advertiser

The spring transfer portal window has officially been shut.

That doesn't mean teams like Auburn football can't make additions, though. The portal is simply closed to new entries. If a player is already in the portal, he can take all the time he wants finding a new program to play for next season, as long as he chooses in time to enroll for the fall semester.

The Tigers escaped the spring window with only six departures, the most notable exit being redshirt freshman cornerback Colton Hood, who had lined himself up as the No. 3 CB on the depth chart behind starters Kayin Lee and Keionte Scott. Jay Fair, Auburn's leader in receptions at receiver in 2023, also left. Hood landed at Colorado with his brother, three-star recruit Brandon Hood, and Fair ended up at USC.

With some holes to fill and seven open scholarship spots remaining, here are a few positions of need the Tigers may target over the next few weeks:

Linebacker

Maybe not the most glaring need in the world — Auburn already has veterans Eugene Asante, Austin Keys, Dorian Mause Jr. and Robert Woodyard Jr. on the roster to go along with freshmen Demarcus Riddick and DJ Barber — but adding one more linebacker could make sense after fifth-year senior Wesley Steiner hit the portal in April.

The Tigers rotated four players at LB last season, and would like to do so again in 2024. Asante, Keys and Mause seem to have three of those spots locked down. A portal LB could at best provide some competition with guys such as Woodyard, Riddick and Barber for that fourth spot and at worst give Auburn some added depth.

Wide receiver

The personnel at receiver has been nearly completely overhauled since coach Hugh Freeze arrived in November 2022. Only one player at the position predates Freeze — junior Camden Brown — and Caleb Burton III is the only other WR who was on the roster last season who is poised to return in 2024.

Auburn has nine scholarship receivers rostered after losing Fair and Koy Moore to the spring portal and adding Penn State transfer KeAndre Lambert-Smith, who led the Nittany Lions with 673 receiving yards on 53 receptions in 2023. Teams typically roster about 10 scholarship WRs. With four freshmen (Bryce Cain, Cam Coleman, Malcolm Simmons and Perry Thompson) and a converted quarterback (Sam Jackson V) set to be in the fold, one more veteran option at receiver could serve the Tigers well.

Cornerback

From cornerbacks Jay Crawford and JC Hart to safeties Terrance Love and Kaleb Harris, Auburn has no shortage of blue-chip talent in the secondary. Options such as Alabama transfer Antonio Kite and former junior-college standout Champ Anthony are in the mix, too.

But losing Hood hurt.

Kite could step up into a main reserve role behind Lee and Scott, but the Tigers would likely benefit from bringing in at least one more cornerback. The staff seems to agree, as San Jose State transfer cornerback Jayvion Cole is set to take an official visit to Auburn from May 7-9, he announced in a social media post Thursday.

How a bit of urgency has helped Hugh Freeze and Auburn's approach to the transfer portal

By Ainslie Lee
al.com

Hugh Freeze's wife had heard enough of her husband's griping about the transfer portal.

"My wife has made me promise I'm through complaining," Freeze said in early April. "But it's just difficult. It's difficult to manage."

Freeze has long maintained his desire to build Auburn's football roster through high school recruiting, even if that's now considered a more dated method.

"Idealistically I'd love to just sign a bunch of high school and build great relationships with them and never lose them," Freeze said in December. "I don't know — that may be in dream land with the way the climate is of college football today."

Back in December, Freeze and the Tigers' coaching staff, for the most part, did just that as they landed a top 10 recruiting class, which featured a historic crop of wide receivers and the last-minute, signing-day flip of 4-star defensive lineman Amaris Williams.

However, none of that came easy.

During his national signing day press conference on Dec. 20, Freeze recalled having to "stay up all night and play video games" in an effort to fend off some of the "late-night pushes" that were coming from competing programs.

Keeping those high school players in the fold was Freeze's priority and it showed — not only during the successful signing day, but also in the less-than-successful winter transfer portal window.

"I don't think I have done very well, truthfully," Freeze said of Auburn's success in the transfer portal during his press conference on Dec. 16. "It's difficult."

At the time, Auburn had added just two transfers in Georgia State transfer wide receiver Robert Lewis and Kansas transfer defensive lineman Gage Keys, all while having seen a dozen Auburn players enter their names into the transfer portal.

And while the Tigers went on to add seven more transfers before the transfer portal window closed on Jan. 2, Freeze felt he and his staff left opportunities on the table after the Tigers entered the race for a handful of transfer targets, but never got them in the boat.

"We've had many visits set and they never even get to campus and they've already decided where they're going before we ever get to ever get in front of them," Freeze said. "Maybe I need to change our approach some to that, but before we get really serious with someone, I'd love to get in front of them and have some conversations."

In short, Freeze and the Tigers hadn't yet mastered the art of speed dating in the transfer portal — a shortcoming that needed to change come the spring transfer window.

Auburn approached the spring transfer window looking to address two specific areas of need: the defensive line and pass catchers.

And in learning from their struggles during the winter transfer window, Freeze and Auburn's coaching staff moved quickly.

"The portal world, maybe we need to start trying to visit them as soon as you can instead of setting up for a weekend that never happens," Freeze said.

So that was Auburn's approach.

On the morning of April 16, the first day the portal opened, the Tigers reportedly expressed interest in Penn State transfer wide receiver KeAndre Lambert-Smith, who told On3 Sports that Auburn was one of the teams he'd heard from since entering the portal.

Come the very next day, April 17, Indiana transfer defensive lineman Philip Bliidi was wrapping up his official visit to The Plains. Meanwhile, it was reported that Lambert-Smith and Arkansas State transfer edge rusher Keyron Crawford had both scheduled visits of their own.

Hugh Freeze and Co. were moving quickly.

Come April 21, the Tigers began seeing the fruits of their labor as Bliidi gave Auburn its first commitment of the spring transfer window.

The next afternoon, Auburn won the commitment of former Texas A&M and USC defensive lineman Isaiah Raikes, followed by the commitment of Crawford just hours later.

In less than a 24-hour span, the Tigers added a mixed bag of experience to their defensive line.

But the biggest splash would come just two days later with the commitment of Lambert-Smith, who chose Auburn over Texas A&M, giving the Tigers the top-ranked wide receiver in the portal.

With the quick additions of Bliidi, Raikes, Crawford and Lambert-Smith, Auburn had effectively addressed the two needs laid out by Freeze following the A-Day spring game, which was a complete 180-degree flip from the winter transfer portal window.

It all goes to show that Freeze and Auburn's staff were never downright bad or incapable of landing transfer targets.

Instead, it points to it being tough to stay up all night playing video games with high school recruits, while also having to worry about hastily scheduling visits for transfer targets.

And that's Freeze's gripe.

"I think our calendar is extremely messed up," Freeze said in December. "It's not good for high school recruiting, portal recruiting, managing your own team, getting ready for bowl prep. I think our

calendar needs a serious, serious look at it for what's best for our game. It's hard for any of us to truly manage all of it."

But Freeze's wife doesn't want to hear it, hence her making Freeze promise to stop whining about it.

Fortunately for her, Auburn's recent portal success might temper some of Freeze's complaints — for now at least.

Who is coming, who is going from Auburn's wide receiver room?

By Matt Cohen
al.com

Koy Moore is reportedly entering the transfer portal. It's the final departure from the previous generation of Auburn receivers and symbolic of the completion of a full-scale overhaul in Auburn's wide receiver room.

It was a necessary one. Auburn had the worst passing offense in the SEC last year by yards per game. A step in the solution would be improving the talent on the roster.

Moore only had three catches in 2023. But of the seven Auburn wide receivers to have double-digit catches in either of the last two seasons, Moore is the fifth to leave.

Moore is also one of five wide receivers to play in each of the last two seasons for Auburn. Below are the combined statistics for those receivers for the 2022 and 2023 seasons.

	Receptions	Yards	Touchdowns
Ja'Varrius Johnson	45	840	6
Jay Fair	33	358	2
Koy Moore	23	338	1
Malcolm Johnson Jr.	8	117	0
Omari Kelly	5	101	0

Those five account for 63% of Auburn's receptions from wide receivers over the last two seasons. They account for 67% of Auburn's receiving yards from wide receivers over the last two seasons. And they account for 69% of touchdowns caught by wide receivers of the last two seasons.

Ja'Varrius Johnson was Auburn's leading wide receiver in yards each of the last two seasons. Moore was second with 314 in 2022.

Over the last two seasons, Auburn has seen 11 wide receivers leave the program via transfer or graduation. They had a total of 145 catches for 2,179 yards and 11 touchdowns.

As a team regardless of position, the production of those departed makes up 41% of the total catches, 52% of the team's total yards and 41% of the team's total receiving touchdowns over the last two years.

Auburn's passing offense was not particularly productive either of those two seasons. Its 162.2 passing yards per game were the worst in the SEC in 121st out of 130 teams nationally in the 2023 season. Auburn was also last in the SEC and 118th nationally in 2022 with about 172 passing yards per game.

That offense wasn't good enough. Far from it. But the group now gone had made up a significant portion of the snaps and production of the team regardless of the overall output's futility.

Yet this was also an exodus Auburn knew it needed. If these were the top producers on a bad offense, then new faces were needed.

So Hugh Freeze made for a full wide receiver room turnover.

As of where Auburn's roster stands at the beginning of May, there will be seven new scholarship wide receivers on the roster next season.

Incoming WRs	Arriving From...	Recruiting Ranking / 2023 College Stats
Cam Coleman	Central HS (Phenix City, AL)	Five-star recruit (No. 5 overall player per 247Sports)
Perry Thompson	Foley HS (Foley, AL)	Four-star recruit (No. 38 overall player per 247Sports)
Malcolm Simmons	Benjamin Russell HS (Alexander City, AL)	Four-star recruit (No. 150 overall player per 247Sports)
Bryce Cain	Baker HS (Mobile, AL)	Four-star recruit (No. 159 overall player per 247Sports)
KeAndre Lambert-Smith	Penn State	53 Rec (led team), 673 Yds (led team), 4 TDs
Sam Jackson V	Cal	Played quarterback at Cal
Robert Lewis	Georgia State	70 Rec, 877 Yds, 7 TDs (all led team)

That group is highlighted by the freshmen: five-star recruit Cam Coleman, four-star recruit Perry Thompson, four-star recruit Bryce Cain and four-star recruit Malcolm Simmons.

It is without question the most talented group of freshman receivers Auburn has ever signed. Coleman is the second highest-rated Auburn recruit of all time regardless of position according to 247Sports. At the time of the December signing period, Thompson was listed as a five-star recruit. Auburn had only ever signed one five-star recruit in program history before this year. At the time of their signing, Auburn had two five-star receivers in this class alone.

Coleman and Cain have already arrived on campus. Thompson and Simmons will get to Auburn this summer. They are the foundational pieces for Freeze's program, especially Coleman who emerged as a star during spring practices and the A-Day spring game.

Coleman had four catches for 92 yards and a touchdown in the spring game.

<https://twitter.com/i/status/1776702779890766077>

He's on track to be an opening-game starter this fall.

The rest of the freshmen will be expected to produce quickly, especially with so many departures leaving so many available snaps. The goal, of course, is to get the improved talent on the field quickly.

Freeze's offense will mix the exciting youth with a collection of experience in two returners: Camden Brown and Caleb Burton as well as incoming transfers KeAndre Lambert-Smith from Penn State and Robert Lewis from Georgia State

Both Lambert-Smith and Lewis led their respective teams in receptions and receiving yards last season. Both have just one year of eligibility remaining.

Lambert-Smith was a significant spring addition as Freeze made it clear during spring practices that he was not done targeting wide receivers after the winter transfer winter and the December high school signing period.

They'll see both a large number of snaps immediately as well as be asked to take on a leadership role — especially Lambert-Smith who has been a key piece of a Penn State offense that played in two New Year's Six bowls.

And then there's Sam Jackson V, an intriguing experiment transfer from Cal. Auburn saw Jackson last season when it played Cal. Except Jackson played quarterback then. Auburn is bringing him in as a wide receiver.

Jackson said he last played wide receiver in high school — he and Auburn quarterback Payton Thorne went to the same Naperville, Illinois high school and briefly were teammates there. Jackson wasn't fully healthy during spring practices, but Auburn players and coaches appear excited about the potential.

"It's a risk, probably," Freeze said of Jackson. "But I think he's one heck of an athlete. I watched all of his high school receiving stuff and he caught all those balls from Payton Thorne. There's chemistry there."

The impending addition of the high school recruits and Auburn's strong pursuit of receivers in the portal were certainly a factor in the departure of such a larger percentage of Auburn's snaps over the last two seasons.

But the last two seasons didn't work. The last two seasons included a coaching change in part because of it.

On paper, it's a much-improved group now.

Auburn, Freeze try to climb the mountain again

By Phillip Marshall

On Jan. 3, 2005, Auburn football players celebrated the end of a perfect 2004 season with a 16-14 victory over Virginia Tech in the Sugar Bowl. It was a season for the ages.

The 2004 Tigers were the first team in school history to win 13 games in a season. They won the SEC championship for the first time since 1989 and had the first perfect record since 1993. Even with the loss of four first-round draft choices and others who would make their marks in the NFL, the future looked bright.

By the time the 2013 season was over, Auburn would have won two more SEC championships, won one national championship and played for another and had seasons with 11, 14 and 12 wins.

In the 20 years since 2004, Auburn has had five losing seasons, including the worst in 60 years, and seven other seasons with at least five losses. Tommy Tuberville would feel compelled to leave after the 2008 season. Gene Chizik, who won a national championship in 2010, would be fired outright. So would Gus Malzahn, who took Auburn to the BCS Championship Game after the 2013 season.

Really, other than Dye's halcyon years from 1983 through 1989, consistency has been elusive for Auburn football. And even then, Dye's 1984 team finished 9-4 after being ranked No. 1 in the preseason polls, and his 1985 team finished 8-4 after being ranked No. 1 a week into the season.

The hard-to-answer question is why that is, and whether second-year Auburn coach Hugh Freeze can change it.

First, the why:

Auburn, for a long time, had a seemingly unique ability to damage itself. Even as Terry Bowden, who took over a program going on probation, was winning in unprecedented fashion, Auburn football was something of a house divided. Later, SACS and Jetgate contributed significantly to the slide that resulted in Tuberville's resignation after a 5-7 season in 2008.

Chizik had lost 10 consecutive games at Iowa State before arriving at Auburn. And some were quick to turn on him when he failed to recapture the national championship magic of 2010 after losing Cam Newton, Nick Fairley and more than two dozen seniors. The woeful 2012 season, when his team was non-competitive down the stretch, sealed his fate.

None of those coaches were blameless, but they also didn't deserve all the blame. All of them, in one way or another, resisted the high expectations that are part of being the head football coach at Auburn. And that won't work.

Maintaining dominance at Auburn is made all the more difficult by the power of its biggest rivals. Alabama responded to Dye's success by hiring Gene Stallings and getting in line behind him. It responded to Tuberville's six-game Iron Bowl winning streak by hiring Nick Saban. Kirby Smart was soon building a powerhouse at Georgia.

Auburn football can climb to the top of the mountain. It has shown that over and over and over again. But it has also shown it can crash hard.

Nobody can make Auburn or any other SEC school a champion every season. But in today's atmosphere, when boosters are asked to pony up millions of dollars to keep programs going, when coaches and even players are made wealthy, anything less than being in the national conversation on a consistent basis is not going to be acceptable for long. That will be doubly true when the 12-team College Football Playoff debuts in the coming season.

Auburn has had three consecutive losing seasons, a numbing reality. Much of the blame lies on the disastrous hire of Bryan Harsin as head coach in December of 2020. Harsin was gone halfway through the 2022 season. That December, Hugh Freeze was hired to come in and try to repair a desperate situation.

Freeze's first season was a bumpy ride. He inherited a roster short on SEC talent. He increased the talent level from the transfer portal, but there was trouble beneath the surface, trouble that led him to rework his coaching staff after one season.

Despite all that, Auburn could have and should have won at least eight games last season. In that respect, it was similar to Dye's first season. Years later, Dye told me "If we'd won those games, we might have thought we were further along than we were."

Dye's teams got better in a hurry after that first season, so much better that Auburn players now play on Pat Dye Field.

Freeze often says that he is convinced Auburn can take its place among the nation's elite and stay there. He is recruiting at a level that makes it possible. If that happens, his name will one day be on something at Auburn, too.

History says it can be done, but history also says it will be a daunting challenge.

Tracking the transfers 5/1

By Bryan Matthews
AuburnSports
Senior Editor

The transfer portal for the 2023-24 season has had a big impact Auburn's roster with 20 outgoing and 13 incoming.

The transfer portal for the spring period opened April 16 and closes April 30 for college football players.

Below is a look at the transfers by position and the impact each will have on AU's depth chart.

*** THE LATEST: Koy Moore entered the portal Wednesday becoming the sixth wide receiver and 20th overall player to leave Auburn. AU now has six outgoing and four incoming this spring.

QUARTERBACK

Transfers out (1): Robby Ashford (SCAR)

Transfers in (0): None

Current (4): Sr. Payton Thorne, So. Holden Geriner, RFr. Hank Brown, TFr. Walker White

Incoming (0): None

The Skinny: Auburn finished spring with four quarterbacks and it looks like it will enter the fall with the same four. Thorne is likely to begin the season as the starter. The biggest question surrounding this group is how much it can improve with better receivers, a better offensive line and having all the offensive coaches on the same page. The battle for No. 2 will continue this fall as a preview of next year's competition for the starter.

RUNNING BACK

Transfers out (0): None

Transfers in (0): None

Current (5): Gr. Brian Battie, Sr. Jarquez Hunter, Jr. Damari Alston, Jr. Sean Jackson, So. Jeremiah Cobb

Incoming (0): None

The Skinny: Battie entered the portal in December but elected to return. It's a talented group and most are capable of a breakout season. Hunter is the most experienced but Alston pushed him hard during the spring and AU's coaches know they've got to get Cobb more touches.

WIDE RECEIVER

Transfers out (6): Omari Kelly, (MTSU) Jyair Shorter (MEM), Malcolm Johnson (BG), Ja'Varrius Johnson, Jay Fair (USC), Koy Moore

Transfers in (3): Sr. Robert Lewis (GSU), Sr. Sam Jackson V (CAL), Sr. KeAndre Lambert-Smith (PSU)

Current (4): Jr. Camden Brown, So. Caleb Burton, TFr. Cam Coleman, TFr. Bryce Cain

Incoming (2): TFr. Perry Thompson, TFr. Malcolm Simmons

The Skinny: The wide receiver position has been transformed during the offseason and showed a lot of improvement during spring drills. The latest addition of Lambert-Smith gives AU a veteran, reliable outside receiver with big-play ability, which will allow Lewis to slide inside to the slot. Lewis, Jackson and Coleman were the starters during the A-Day game. Two more freshmen are scheduled to arrive next month. Only two receivers, Brown and Burton, return from last year's unit.

TIGHT END

Transfers out (1): Tyler Fromm (GSU)

Transfers in (1): So. Rico Walker (MARY)

Current (4): Gr. Luke Deal, Gr. Brandon Frazier, Sr. Rivaldo Fairweather, So. Micah Riley

Incoming (0):

The Skinny: One of the strongest positions on the team with three veterans including Fairweather, who set an AU record for catches as a tight end last season. Riley and Walker preformed well this spring and will be ready to step into a starring role next season.

OFFENSIVE LINE

Transfers out (0): None

Transfers in (1): Sr. Percy Lewis (MSU)

Current (13): Sr. Jeremiah Wright, Sr. Tate Johnson, Sr. Dillon Wade, Sr. Izavion Miller, Sr. Jaden Muskrat, So. E.J. Harris, So. Connor Lew, RFr. Tyler Johnson, RFr. Dylan Senda, RFr. Clay Wedin, RFr. Bradyn Joiner, So. Seth Wilfred, TFr. Favour Edwin

Incoming (1): TFr. DeAndre Carter

The Skinny: Percy stepped in at left tackle to solidify AU's offensive line this spring. Wade did well moving to left guard while Wright looks to have finally secured a full-time starting position at right guard. Lew is a budding star at center and Miller worked hard to increase his quickness over the offseason. This is the healthiest AU's offensive line has looked in years.

DEFENSIVE LINE

Transfers out (3): Enyce Sledge (ILL), Stephen Johnson, Wilky Denaud

Transfers in (4): Jr. Gage Keys (KAN), Sr. Trill Carter (TEX), Sr. Philip Blidi (IND), Sr. Isaiah Raikes (USC)

Current (8): Sr. Zeke Walker, Sr. Jayson Jones, Sr. Quientrail Jamison-Travis, So. Keldric Faulk, RFr. Darron Reed, TFr. T.J. Lindsey, TFr. Malik Blocton, TFr. Amaris Williams

Incoming (0): None

The Skinny: Auburn has boosted this position in a big way via the portal. Keys and Carter made an immediate impact starting the spring game. The two spring additions, Blidi and Raikes, should compete for starting spots and be big parts of the playing rotation. Faulk is poised for a big season after starting as a true freshman last season. If Reed continues to improve, he could make an impact this fall. All three freshmen look like future stars.

BUCK LINEBACKER

Transfers out (2): Stephen Sings, Brenton Williams (LIB)

Transfers in (1): Jr. Keyron Crawford (ARST)

Current (3): Sr. Jalen McLeod, TFr. Jamonta Waller, TFr. Joseph Phillips

Incoming (0): None

The Skinny: Crawford was a key addition giving Auburn experienced depth behind McLeod, who is AU's top pass rusher. Waller and Phillips are talented freshmen and should have opportunities to play this fall. Both have big upsides.

INSIDE LINEBACKER

Transfers out (2): Cam Riley, Wesley Steiner

Transfers in (1): Sr. Dorian Maus Jr. (DUKE)

Current (5): Sr. Eugene Asante, Sr. Austin Keys, So. Robert Woodyard, TFr. Demarcus Riddick, TFr. D'Angelo Barber

Incoming (0): None

The Skinny: The heart of the defense led by Asante, the linebacker position has talent, experience, depth and some talented freshmen. Keys and Mausi are both physical defenders between the tackles. Despite the depth, Riddick and Barber should play this fall and could both be starters in 2025. AU is looking for an additional Will LB that could backup Asante and brought in former USA standout Khalil Jacobs for a visit this week.

CORNERBACK AND NICKEL

Transfers out (3): Austin Ausberry (LSU), J.D. Rhym, Colton Hood (BUF)

Transfers in (1): So. Antonio Kite (ALA)

Current (7): Sr. Keionte Scott, Jr. Champ Anthony, So. Kayin Lee, RFr. Tyler Scott, RFr. J.C. Hart, TFr. Jalyn Crawford, TFr. Kensley Faustin

Incoming (1): TFr. A'Mon Lane-Ganus

The Skinny: It was a surprise to see both Hood and Scott enter the portal earlier this week, but Scott has withdrawn and will play at Auburn this fall. Hood is a loss as AU's likely third corner going into fall but Scott can take that role along with being a key backup at nickel. This spring, Keionte Scott made the move from nickel to corner and Lee stepped up as the other starter. Anthony was a standout at nickel. Crawford and Faustin both showed a lot of promise as true freshman while Hart to a step forward in his development.

SAFETY

Transfers out (2): Marquise Gilbert, Donovan Kaufman (NCST)

Transfers in (1): Sr. Jerrin Thompson (TEX)

Current (6): Jr. Caleb Wooden, So. Terrance Love, RFr. Sylvester Smith, RFr. C.J. Johnson, So. Laquan Robinson, TFr. Kaleb Harris

Incoming (0): None

The Skinny: Thompson was an important addition and looks like a starter. There's plenty of competition, however, with Wooden and Smith also standouts in the spring along with Harris, who was the biggest surprise among the true freshmen. Robinson could also make a push this fall.

TOTALS

Transfers out: 20

Transfers in: 13

Current: 61 (includes kicker and punter)

Incoming: 4

PROJECTED TOTAL: 78

Transfer LB: Auburn 'great place to be'

By Caleb Jones
AuburnSports
Staff

Auburn is still working in the transfer portal.

Having already added four new names to their program this spring, the Tigers are pursuing a fifth in former South Alabama linebacker Khalil Jacobs. The former two-star had a monster year for the Jaguars last season, making him a popular name in the portal.

He was on Auburn's campus Tuesday through Thursday for an official visit.

"It was a nice visit, more than I expected coming to Auburn," Jacobs said. "Definitely a great place to be around and definitely a great place to be."

Auburn is recruiting Jacobs as a dime, but also as somewhat of a hybrid player that's able to come off the edge. He feels like that's his best asset and when it comes down to it, finding the best fit for him in a defense is the most important factor.

"Really just a system I can fit in best so I can put my abilities on the field, I can be dominant," Jacobs said. "Some universities, they want me to play mike on the field and be in the box, but I feel like I'm a stinger. I can play in space and I can blitz off the edge, but really, anywhere they can let me showcase my skills."

Defensive coordinator DJ Durkin was there to answer any questions Jacobs had about his potential role and the defensive scheme.

"I could tell he's a great coach, he's gonna help me out with my fundamentals and technique, everything I've been missing as a college football linebacker," Jacobs said.

As a true freshman, Jacobs saw action in 11 games for South Alabama, mostly on special teams. Jacobs took a step up in his sophomore season with the Jaguars, appearing in 13 games and making a stronger contribution on defense.

He was fifth on the team in tackles with 56 in 2023, also recording 8.5 tackles for loss and three sacks.

Jacobs still has two visits to take, one to Missouri and one to Alabama. Once he wraps up his visit with the Crimson Tide this weekend, it's decision time.

What sticks out the most about Auburn?

"Really just the environment, the people, they love you," Jacobs said. "They're gonna make you feel at home. My coach DJ Durkin, he really sold me on how he's put many guys in the league and that's where I'm trying to get to. If I want to be great, take a chance on him, come see what Auburn's about. It's great out here, I love it."

Transfer Defensive Back Sets Official Visit Dates To Auburn

By Zac Blackerby
Auburn Daily

The Auburn Tigers will host a talented transfer defensive back on an official visit next week.

San Jose State defensive back Jay'Vion Cole posted on social media that he will be in Auburn May 7 through 9 for an official visit.

Last season, Cole was San Jose State's highest rated defender according to PFF. He played the majority of his snaps at outside corner. Of his 876 total snaps last year, 627 were at outside corner, just six were in the slot, and he lined up in the box on 61 snaps.

He also helped on special teams. He was involved in kick and punt returns, as well as kick off coverage and field goal block snaps.

Cole, the 5-foot-10, 175 pound transfer has played two years of college football. His freshman year, he played for Cal Poly. He played in 11 games and recorded 20 tackles. He also led Cal Poly with four picks.

In 2023 at San Jose State, he had 10 pass breakups and three interceptions. He also recorded three tackles for a loss and a sack. His 10 pass breakups were second in the Mountain West Conference last season.

https://twitter.com/d1jcole/status/1786034472355577873?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1786034472355577873%7Ctwgr%5Edf39045c7603e5cbf62312412ff0391def734f68%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.si.com%2Fcollege%2Fauburn%2Ftransfer-cornerback-sets-official-visit-jayvion-cole

Cole's two remaining years of eligibility are a key factor in why he would fit at Auburn. The Tigers need more juniors on the roster to help stagger the depth at multiple positions, cornerback being one of them.

Cole entered the portal on April 25th. He's received offers from schools like Michigan State, Cincinnati, Miami (OH), and Houston. Auburn was the first school for him to tweet out that he was taking an official visit to.

Auburn Coach Visits Elite EDGE Recruit

By Zac Blackerby
Auburn Daily

There's a reason Auburn football recruiting has been trending up since Hugh Freeze arrived.

The Auburn coaching staff loves to recruit and they see the value and importance of it as they look to rebuild the Auburn football program. The coaching staff has been on the road and looking to build relationships with players and coaches throughout the state.

Mae Jemison High School Football's account on X posted a photo of Auburn's EDGE coach Josh Aldridge visiting the school. Mae Jemison is the home of elite EDGE target Hezekiah Harris.

Auburn has received predictions over the past few weeks to land the services of the 2026 star pass rusher and EDGE defender.

Harris is listed at 6-foot-4, 210 pounds and could get bigger before his high school career wraps up. It seems like Auburn holds the lead for Harris. According to On3's Recruiting Prediction Machine, Auburn has a 92.3% chance of landing Harris. They give Alabama a 5.1% chance and Mississippi State a 2.1% shot at landing the talented EDGE defender.

Auburn's 2026 class has already started to form. Hugh Freeze and the Auburn Tigers have two players committed in the class. Kail Ellis and Denairius Gray.

Here's a brief bio on Ellis from Auburn Daily's Brian Smith: "Ellis plays center with the quickness and physical nature that will translate to the SEC. Powerfully built in the upper body, his explosiveness often overwhelms a defensive lineman before the opponent counters."

Here's a brief bio on Gray from Smith: "Gray plays for one of the nation's most prominent prep programs. To that point, despite playing with 2024 Miami wide receiver signee Joshisa Trader and 2024 Ohio State wide receiver signee Jeremiah Smith, Gray's two-year statistics include 81 receptions, 1,124 yards, and 25 touchdowns (Max Preps). There are several reasons he's putting up big numbers."