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# The view from the booth: A night with the GS football stat crew

*A behind-the-scenes look at an integral part of game day*



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**STATESBORO** - A college football stadium on game day is a whirlwind of activity from dawn until dusk, like a retail store on Black Friday or Jim Cantore during hurricane season.

The trio of veterans Marc Holland, Mark Schwartz and Guy Malool, along with newcomer Aaron Socha, are the main cogs of the stat crew — a high-paced, controlled-chaos, low-margin-for-error job that is critical to the operation of the game.

The stats being fed to the scoreboard? They come from this crew. The stats being used by ESPN for graphics and recited by the announcers? Yep, those come from this crew. The stats used by the coaches to assess halftime numbers and post-game analysis?

You guessed it.

Sitting on the front row of the press box, tucked in the corner away from media members and any influential personnel with their trusty replay monitor, Holland sits on the left and is charged with the defensive calls while Schwartz sits on the right and handles the offense. In the middle sits Socha, a sophomore from the Charlotte area who is in his second year working in the athletics communications office.

If the StatCrew software crashes (it has before) or the inputter gets behind (he has before) Schwartz's tedious work is a crucial fail-safe. He's been manually writing down every play since 1985, except for the one home game he missed in 2011 for a wedding.

There's Holland, who drives 850 miles round trip from Sarasota, Florida, for each game just to record the defensive statistics.

Then there's Malool — who has been a top Realtor on Hilton Head Island/Bluffton for 30 years — who is the press box's internal public address announcer, providing an audio service for the working media.

The crew arrives about two hours before the game and places their binoculars, notebooks and trusty No. 2 pencils in their spots, along with game notes and the flip card. As kickoff nears, crew members scarf down a few slices of pizza to keep their energy up for the long night ahead.

At 7:05 p.m., Malool checks the Internet for the official kickoff temperature report.

Moments after the national anthem concludes, Malool begins his first address of the evening to anyone within earshot of the internal PA system.

"Good evening everybody, at this time we ask that you please find your assigned seat and be seated for the kickoff of tonight's game," Malool says over the intercom after reading a scripted introduction. "On behalf of the Sun Belt, Georgia Southern University and the Georgia Southern Athletics Communications Office, we'd like to welcome you to Allen E. Paulson Stadium. If any member of the Georgia Southern Athletics Communications Staff can be of assistance to you during your stay, please don't hesitate to ask. Our weather at kickoff is 72 degrees with wind out of the south/southeast at 2 miles per hour with 72 percent humidity."

After the teams take the field and the coin toss is completed, the crew locks in and settles in for nearly three and a half hours of statistical excitement.

At 7:32 p.m. Schwartz calls out "91 (App State kicker Bentley Critcher) to kickoff, 11 (GS receiver [Malik Henry](#)) and 1 (GS running back [L.A. Ramsby](#)) back deep."

With a large record-breaking crowd settling in, the three get ready for the return and ... "to the goal line, returned to the 29, tackle 91, 1st and 10 at the GS 29."

Malool deciphers the code and makes the announcement to the assembled media in the press box. And they're off.

To identify players, spotters have their own shorthand jargon, sometimes sounding more like air traffic controllers carefully maneuvering planes to the runway than statisticians at a football game.

"4-E is in"

"No huddle 1-S shotgun"

"36 rush"

"11 pass incomplete, intended for 16, broken up by 27, hurry from 56"

This can get sticky when players (either on offense, defense or special teams) share the same uniform number.

To avoid confusion in such cases, there's also a StatCrew code used, though it doesn't always match exactly with the player's jersey number. Senior quarterback [Kevin Ellison](#) is "4-E" while freshman cornerback [Monquavion Brinson](#) is "4-B." [Montay Crockett](#) is "9-C" and [Younghoe Koo](#) is "9-K" causing the crew to always double check their cheat sheet to make sure Brinson is credited with a pass of Koo credited with a catch.

Amongst the flurry of communication from Holland and Schwartz, Socha furiously types in the codes and numbers to make sure the live stats sent to the StatBroadcast feed are accurate. Malool echoes the calls into his wireless mic to make sure the media in the press box know the official spots and stats.

Every now and then, Assistant AD for Athletics Communications [Bryan Johnston](#) will chime in with notes or records for Malool to read, such as [Jay Bowdry](#) recording his first career interception, or [Ukeme Eligwe](#)'s fumble return going as the second-longest in program history.

At a little after 8 p.m., the first quarter ends and Socha sends the quickie stats to the copier for running to several different spots and booths in the press box. He usually does this again at the end of the half, third quarter and game, along with the play-by-play, final stats, participation and game wrap-up. But tonight, he sends the halftime stats three different times after the half "ends" not once, not twice, but three times and eventually ends in a blocked field goal.

The dialogue between Schwartz and Holland is something to behold. The two have seen a lot of plays in Paulson Stadium. Any time a big play happens, they can remember a similar one. Eligwe's 90-yard fumble return for a touchdown elicits

immediate memories of the record-setting 97-yard fumble return by Rodney Oglesby against Valdosta State in 1990. As the Eagles struggle to move the ball, Schwartz gives a vivid recap of the 1995 playoff game at Montana in a blizzard where the Eagles netted just 91 yards of total offense in a loss.

Schwartz is the veteran of the group. He says the first game he both attended and worked was the 1985 season opener against Middle Tennessee. He of course remembers that GS lost 35-10. He remembers everything.

In his early post-college career, Schwartz was a PR/PI executive and Sports Information Director at a D3 college in Illinois before moving to Hilton Head Island. He always kept stats while coaching his children's teams to confirm his suspicions that "numbers don't lie. Parents always think their child is batting .738 when in fact they only batted .258!"

He's retired and lives near the beach on Hilton Head Island and continues to umpire baseball and referee football in his spare time.

"I told a former GSU SID many years ago that I would pay GSU to let me dictate football play-by-play statistics because I enjoy it so much," Schwartz said. "I feel like I've helped contribute in a small way to the incredible success of the program, and that I've always felt as if I was a part of the team. I've watched the incredible rebirth and success of the GSU football program from its infancy through six 1-AA/FCS titles until last year's GoDaddy Bowl win and it's been a great ride."

As the lead statistician, Schwartz writes down every play in an old spiral notebook. He has every notebook going back to 1985 and uses his own code letters as he writes as my form of shorthand.

"I realized early on in my SID career that if the typist/inputter makes a mistake inputting a player name/number, enters the wrong code or might spot the ball on wrong side of 50 yard line, and multiple plays continue to be run, that I MUST record what is happening or it can't be retrieved because its impossible to remember all that information," Schwartz said.

Holland has been around Georgia Southern football the longest of the three. The first Georgia Southern game he ever attended as a fan was the 1982 match-up between the Eagles and Valdosta State at Statesboro High School's Womack Field, the only tie in program history. He was a 19-year-old sophomore at GS at the time. He also attended the first game ever played at Paulson Stadium, a 48-11 win over Liberty in 1984 and his first game as a member of the stat crew was the 2009 season opener against Albany and he hasn't missed a home game since.

He used to work in the University's Office of Marketing and Communications, which worked closely with Athletic Media Relations to provide feature stories for the game program and set up interviews for the radio halftime show. That led to him getting a seat in the press box on game days, and then helping out whenever and wherever I was

needed. Among other things, he served as a spotter for the announcers on TV broadcasts and acted as a sideline monitor to make sure that nobody was roaming around down there without the proper pass. He joined the stat crew in 2009 and kept up with participation for three seasons before taking over the defensive stats in 2012.

While Schwartz and Malool drive together from Hilton Head, Holland has a little longer drive. After obtaining his second degree from Georgia Southern, Holland began a new career as a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) analyst and is currently employed by the Sarasota County Government in Sarasota, Florida. So that's over 13 hours round-trip in the car just to stat each game!

"Football is my favorite sport, and I've developed a genuine passion for Georgia Southern football over the past 35 years or so," Holland said. "When I first moved to Sarasota prior to the 2015 season, I figured I would have to give up my seat on the stat crew. I mean, who wants to make an 850-mile round trip five or six times a year just to watch a football game? But the Eagles have such a proud tradition and a promising future, and I wanted to be a part of it in a small way. I have to use a little vacation time for the Thursday night games, but I think it's worth it. Despite the distance, I hope to continue keeping stats as long as I have my health and reliable transportation."

The way schools track statistics and reporters follow games is markedly different now from the 1980s, and even through the first six years of the new decade. Now, reporters can look at live trackers and tweet their own play-by-play — but the stat-keeping that the crew does is still vital, as the StatBroadcast feed used nearly universally by reporters is run by the crew.

"For many years I did play-by-play and we always had about seven other press box helpers record in pencil actual statistics including defense and player participation in the old NCAA Football Statistics Working Chart book," Schwartz recalls. "But to record play-by-play in 1985 and for several years afterwards, we used an old ditto master - the blue carbon paper between two sheets of typing paper - and an electric typewriter to record the play-by-play. Typing mistakes were corrected with a capital X over the error and we then went to simple typing paper with white-out liquid used to correct mistakes, but we had to wait for the white-out to dry. This was made easier with white-out correction tape. Then at the conclusion of each quarter a copy machine was used to make copies for stats distribution to media.

"During those times I only relayed the player's name to the typing inputter so I had to memorize player's numbers before the game. Eventually the Statman 1 computer program was developed and I started calling out the jersey number of the player instead of his name. I can remember that sometime in the 1990s a computer programmer sat in our press box and tried to develop a computer program to implement to record play-by-play and game statistics but he had a difficult time because of many of the strange nuances that occur during a football game. Football play-by-play is much more difficult than baseball or basketball because so many different things can occur during a football play that affects spotting the ball including fumbles and interceptions with subsequent

return yardage, laterals and marking off penalties. I think the implementation of the computer program to record play-by-play and compute statistics instantaneously has dramatically altered and greatly improved the speed and statistical recording of each game but it has its problems if the inputter types in wrong information ... that's where my handwritten notebooks come into play!"

Holland sees the increase of online broadcasting as the biggest change in terms of statting the defense.

"In a peripheral kind of way, more games are being broadcast live on television or streamed live on the Internet, which gives us more access to instant replay," he said. "Sometimes it really helps to be able to see a play two or three times when you're trying to determine who caused a fumble or blocked a kick."

One of the perks of Malool's job is being among the first to publicly inform the media of milestones and records as players approach them.

"There's no place I'd rather be than behind a microphone announcing a game," he said. "I'm able to express my passion and love for the games, athletes and fans utilizing my voice, understanding and knowledge. It is my desire to create an exciting environment for everyone."

Malool has been a professional PA announcer going on 25 years. His career includes working with the Greenville Drive (Red Sox), Savannah Sand Gnats (Mets), University of South Carolina Beaufort baseball, Georgia Southern and Armstrong State baseball and basketball, The Sun Conference Baseball Championship, ESPN Radio, Dixie Youth World Series, Coaches vs. Cancer Basketball, Hilton Head High School and Hilton Head Christian baseball, basketball and football.

He is in his third year as the internal PA announcer for Georgia Southern football.

"Mark asked me many times in years past to attend a game, but conflicts were always a problem with raising four kids and a full-time career," Malool said.

While Schwartz and Holland recount the play of [Tracy Ham](#), Adrian Peterson and some of the legends of the past, Malool said his favorite play was a more recent one.

"[Matt Breida](#) is an amazing athlete and the best player I've witnessed at Georgia Southern," he said. "We were playing App State on a Thursday night on ESPN in 2014. He busted up the middle for a 54-yard touchdown run. This set the tone for the remainder of the game and Eagle victory."

Malool relies on the trio of statisticians to quickly spot the ball and make decisions on who gets what to relay to him so he can make the announcement. While Holland and Schwartz have the luxury of only knowing numbers, Malool gets the unenviable task of making sure he pronounces each name correctly.

"Many of the names are a real challenge when you are a perfectionist like me at getting it right," Malool said. "I start preparing a week in advance when Bryan emails me rosters. I literally break down the names into syllables and associate them with common words. This way I'm able to get it right. I like to arrive two hours before game time to make final preparations and notes to my flip card. You will often see me talking with the visiting team's SID to insure correct pronunciation."

And the one that still haunts him?

"The hardest name for me was quarterback Ezayi Youyoute. To this day, I still look at it and my heart rate increases!"

The game featured a blocked field goal, a half that would not end and a few other quirky plays. All-in-all, the game goes smoothly from a statistical standpoint and ends at 11:05 p.m. with the home team coming up short to the visiting Mountaineers.

At 11:14 p.m., after the participation is entered and the finals stats are verified, Socha hits save one last time and turns the computer back over to the communications staff, who send out the files to the Appalachian State, Sun Belt Conference and national media.

The group heads out the back door, back to their normal lives - selling real estate, working for the Sarasota County Government, enjoying the retired life and being a student - and says their goodbyes until they convene again in two weeks when the Eagles host UL Lafayette on a Thursday Night.

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