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GREEN



# BOMBS AWAY

ONCE AN EAST-WEST BATTLE FOUGHT BY AUBURN AND ALABAMA,  
THE STATE'S COLLEGE FOOTBALL WARS HAVE TWO NEW  
CAPTAINS AT THE NORTH AND SOUTH: TERRY BOWDEN AT UNA  
AND JOEY JONES AT USA. **BOMBS AWAY.**

BY LOYD MCINTOSH | PHOTOS BY JASON WALLIS



## **IF THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AND AUBURN UNIVERSITY ARE LIKE BIG, WELL-ARMED BATTLESHIPS PASSING IN THE NIGHT ON THE ROUGH WATERS OF COLLEGE FOOTBALL, THERE IS NOW A PAIR OF SMALL, AGILE ENEMY SUBS LURKING BELOW THE SURFACE WITH EXPERIENCED, BATTLE-TRAINED CAPTAINS AT THE CONTROLS.**

To the north, is the University of North Alabama in Florence. The Lions drafted former Auburn skipper Terry Bowden to bring a new level of experience and publicity to the Division II powerhouse. There should be no confusion where Captain Bowden is to take the UNA squad: To the Promised Land. North Alabama has won national championships in the past, and the expectation is they will win more in the future. Those at the helm at UNA have entrusted Bowden to navigate the high seas in search of enemy subs with complete destruction in mind.

To the south, the University of South Alabama is about to put their new experimental sub into the drink for the very first time. Christening their program as a Division I team in the bay city of Mobile, it's sink-or-swim time for the USA Jaguars. At the wheel is Joey Jones, a Mobile native, Crimson Tide legend, and a lifelong football man with a history of setting sail for new territory. These are uncharted waters for South Alabama, and the destination is largely unknown.

But enough of the nautical talk. Bowden and Jones are football guys, not sailors, although they both enjoy a little fishing from time to time. Does either coach and his university pose a real threat to Alabama and Auburn? Probably not. But there is no doubt with men like Bowden and Jones coaching at UNA and USA, football in Alabama just got a lot more interesting.

### **JOEY JONES**

Down in South Alabama a community's dream is finally becoming a reality. This fall, after a decade of talking, planning, fund raising, more talking, and certainly a little praying, the University of South Alabama will finally field its first intercollegiate football team. The USA Jaguars will strap on pads for the first time with native son Joey Jones pacing the sidelines. A Crimson Tide legend in the last days of the Bear Bryant era, Jones returns to his hometown after a 25-year career that kept him close to home and provided him with some interesting opportunities.

Jones was a wide receiver for the Tide from 1979-1983, ranking third in Alabama history in career touchdowns. After leaving the Capstone, Jones played for the Birmingham Stallions of the United States Football League and then for the NFL's former perennial doormats, the Atlanta Falcons. Jones en-

tered coaching in 1989, first as an assistant at Briarwood in Birmingham, then with head coaching gigs at Dora and, most importantly, Mountain Brook, where his reputation as a program builder was established.

Prior to his arrival at Mountain Brook, the Spartans had nine straight losing seasons. In 10 seasons as head coach, Jones led Mountain Brook to four region titles, two semi-final appearances, three quarterfinal appearances, and one appearance in the state championship game. His success during that time didn't go unnoticed.

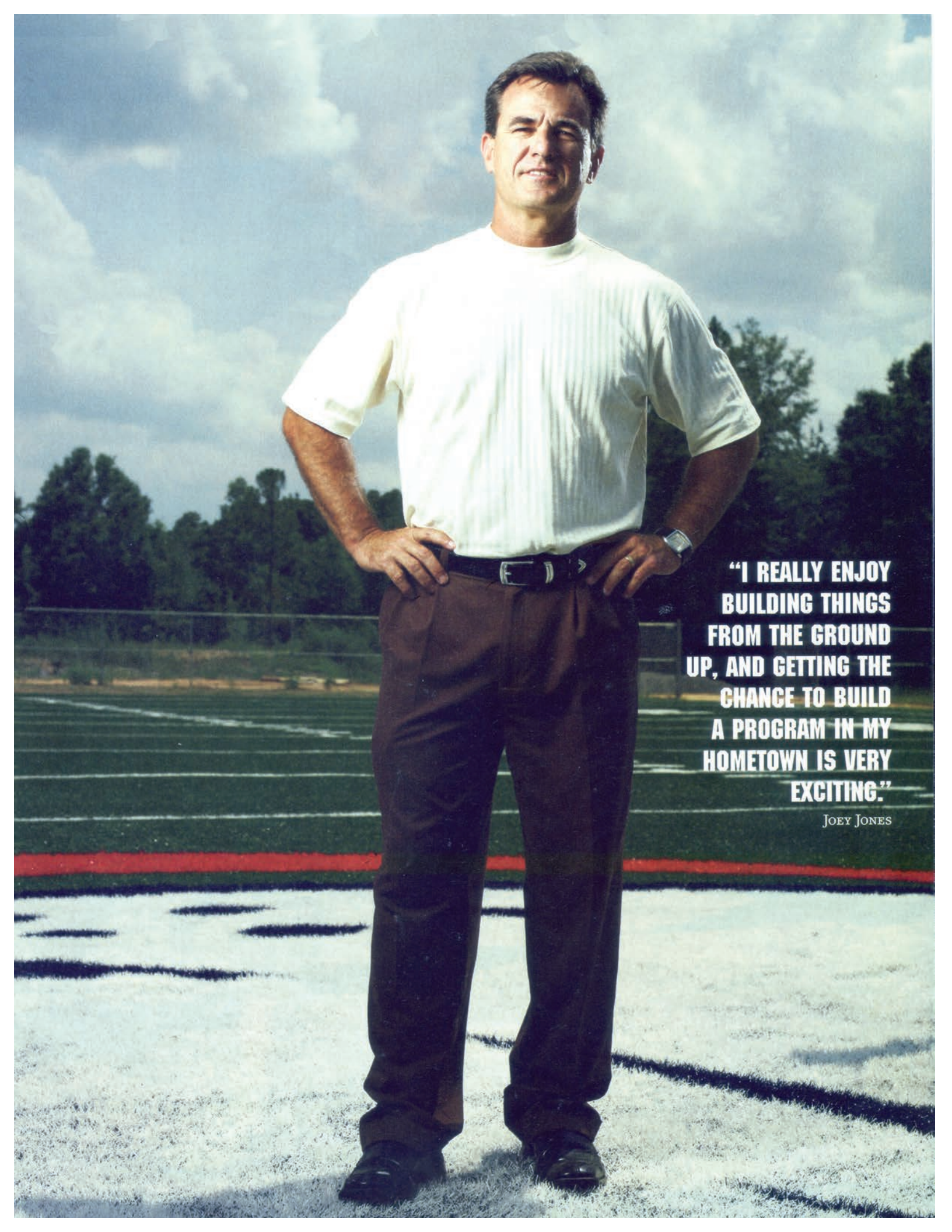
In 2006, Jones was tapped to revive football at Birmingham-Southern College, an institution that had not participated in intercollegiate football since 1939. BSC leadership made the decision a few months earlier to end participating in NCAA Division I athletics to the more sensible non-scholarship level Division III. Jones's first Birmingham-Southern squad took the field in the fall of 2007 and

performed well enough to catch the attention of South Alabama athletic director Joe Gottfried. Jones was announced to the public as the first head football in South Alabama history on February 15, 2008. Joey Jones was coming home to begin the greatest challenge of his career.

"Mobile is in my heart, but I never thought I'd have the opportunity to start a football program from scratch in my hometown," Jones says from a cell phone while driving to parts unknown (nothing secretive here, this reporter just forgot to ask him where he was headed). "I didn't really want to leave Birmingham. There are a lot of good people in that city, but I really enjoy building things from the ground up, and getting the chance to build a program in my hometown is very exciting."

And Jones is helping to literally build a football program at USA. At the time of this interview in early July, South Alabama was



A full-body photograph of a man standing on a baseball field. He is wearing a white short-sleeved polo shirt, brown trousers, and a black belt. He has his hands on his hips and is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background shows a green baseball field with white and red base paths, a chain-link fence, and trees under a cloudy sky.

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just a few weeks away from opening its new football center, a 49,000-square-foot complex that houses coaches' offices, training rooms, weight rooms, and film rooms for the Jaguar football program. From here, Jones will watch over the program from its infancy to a full-fledged Division I program. The center is a far cry from the accommodations Jones endured during his first days on the job. "For the first two weeks, my office was the steps of the Mitchell Center. I had a notebook, a pen, and a cell phone," Jones says.

Building a football team that even has a shot at making waves at South Alabama is going to take some time. The team only has seven games on the schedule in 2009 and, due to NCAA rules, won't be eligible for a bowl game until 2013. However, Jones has raised a few eyebrows with the caliber of athlete he attracted to Mobile, including running back Brandon Ross, a transfer from the University of Memphis; and Brennan Smith, a quarterback from Oregon State. Without a rich football past to bank on, Jones has to market what the future will look like to prospective athletes.

"I have to sell a dream or a vision to them. What I have to do is get kids to realize the possibilities of what our staff can offer them and how they have the opportunity to build something for the future," Jones says.

"Everyone wants to be number one and go undefeated, but you have to be realistic and understand that it's not going to happen overnight. We have to set goals each year that are realistic," he adds.

One of those goals is develop a fan base, although Jones is confident that Mobile and the surrounding area will fill Ladd-Peebles Stadium when the Jaguars begin play against Hargrave Military Academy on September 5th. He also understands the reality of football in Alabama. Either you're an Alabama or Auburn fan. "But, in Mobile everyone is pulling for South Alabama. We'll sell it out," Jones says. "My goal is to be the third-best team in the state."

## TERRY BOWDEN

New Year's Eve morning 2008, Florence, Alabama. A press conference is about to convene on the campus of the University of North Alabama to introduce the college's eighth head coach since the Truman administration. After a few moments of introduction, the rumors become official: Alabama native and

former Auburn University Head Coach Terry Bowden is now the Head Football Coach of the UNA Lions.

To the casual football fan, the hiring of Bowden after a decade out of football may have been a head-scratcher. "I thought he was enjoying broadcasting," Mr. Casual Fan may have said to himself. But, to someone who really follows college football, Bowden's return to the sideline was no surprise.

As early as the summer of 2007, Bowden began publicly expressing his desire get back into college coaching. Case in point: on July 30, 2007, Bowden ended his weekly Yahoo! Sports college football blog this way:

*Folks, I just can't sit and watch anymore. I need to be standing on the sideline. I need to reach down and pick some grass to toss into the wind. I need to scream in a quarterback's ear. I need to reach up and grab that linebacker by the facemask. I need to call the play that wins—or loses—the game.*

**"I'M NOT 30-YEARS-OLD. I'VE BEEN THERE AND DONE THAT, AND I CAN BE VERY CONTENT BUILDING A CHAMPIONSHIP TEAM HERE AT NORTH ALABAMA. WHEN YOU KNOW YOU'RE NOT GOING TO BE WINNINGEST COACH IN YOUR OWN FAMILY, THERE REALLY ISN'T MUCH TO PROVE."** TERRY BOWDEN

Bowden wasn't just whistling Dixie about this either. Even though it would be 18 months until these words proved prophetic, Bowden was in the mix for the West Virginia job—his alma mater and the school where his father Bobby Bowden really began to make a name for himself—following the departure of Rich Rodriguez to Michigan.

However, 10 years after walking away from the game and pretty good gigs as a football broadcaster for ABC, columnist, and motivational speaker, the question is, what made him decide to get back into coaching?

"About the time I turned 50 I looked in the mirror and asked, 'Is this what I want to do with the rest of my life?'" Bowden says, via phone from his office on the UNA campus in early July. "I figured if I was ever going to get back into coaching, I'd better do it now.

"You have to understand," he adds, "from the time I was 26-years-old until I was 42, I was a head coach in college football."

UNA is a regular Division II power, winning three national championships in a row from 1993-1995. The Lions finished the 2008 season with a record of 12-2 and reached the semifinals of the playoffs and a final rank-

ing of third in Division II. In other words, this isn't a rebuilding year, despite the fact that the team lost 21 seniors off of last year's squad. Bowden, with his pedigree, past record of success, and obvious PR appeal, understands what is at stake in this football-crazed community.

"People in this community live and die UNA football, and the expectations have gotten even higher since I took the job," Bowden says. "There's only one goal—to win a national championship."

So, Bowden moved to Florence and, thus far, seems to be in his element. He admits he didn't know that much about the area before accepting the job but now says he loves it, especially the opportunities to drop a line in the lake for a little fishing when time allows. He still talks 90-miles-per-hour and likes to drop a great line or two rather than sticking to the dry coach-speak of many of today's coaches.

He's also brought in some bright minds

to his coaching staff, including brother Jeff Bowden and former NFL player and assistant coach Pat Carter. He has also attracted a few Division I transfers from Louisville and Ole Miss. All things point to a very successful tenure at the Division II level.

Some may wonder whether UNA is just a stepping stone back into Division I for Bowden. After all, he was the first coach to go undefeated in his first season at the Division I level, and he did lead Auburn to a 20-game winning streak—its longest ever—before he walked out in the middle of the 1998 season. However, Bowden, now 53, says he is not looking to leave UNA any time soon and is looking forward to taking the field for the first time in over a decade.

"I'm not 30-years-old. I've been there and done that, and I can be very content building a championship team here at North Alabama," Bowden says. "When you know you're not going to be winningest coach in your own family, there really isn't much to prove."

"I'm very excited, but I don't want it to come too soon because I have so much to do to get ready," Bowden adds. "But I am excited. It's been a while." 🍌