

NFL DRAFT

Metro Atlanta teen, who lost his arm to sepsis, will announce Falcons' draft pick

Peachtree City 13-year-old is scheduled to announce team's 4th-round selection Saturday in Green Bay.



Bowen Harbuck, 13, poses with his siblings and Freddie Falcon outside his home in Peachtree City. (Ben Hendren for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution)

By David Aaro

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PEACHTREE CITY — A smile appeared on the normally stoic face of 13-year-old Bowen Harbuck once he saw Atlanta Falcons running back Bijan Robinson pop up on a computer screen inside his Peachtree City home Thursday morning.

Just over a year ago, the longtime fan lost his right arm after an infection led him to go into septic shock. Now, his favorite player had something very important to tell him: Bowen would be announcing the team's fourth-round pick onstage at the NFL draft in Green Bay, Wisconsin, on Saturday.

"I need you to be ready," Robinson said in the prerecorded video. "I'm a friend of yours now, so I just hope you will have a great time, man."

Bowen kept his emotions bottled up as friends, family members, two Falcons cheerleaders and team mascot Freddie Falcon surrounded the teenager with love during the surprise send-off.

But inside, Bowen was "screaming for joy," according to his father, Alex Harbuck.



Bowen Harbuck, 13, with his mother and father. (Ben Hendren for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution)

The teen, who loves working with statistics, can easily recall the names and positions of countless Falcons players of the past. He used his extensive NFL knowledge to win his fantasy league last year.

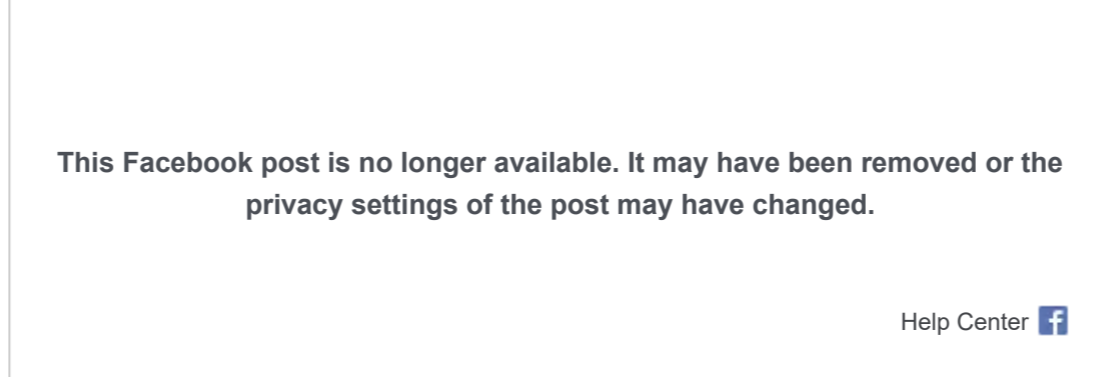
Harbuck said Bowen was already quizzing him about whom the Falcons should draft this weekend. Bowen told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution he hopes they select a defensive lineman or a middle linebacker in the first round Thursday night.

The walls of Bowen's bedroom are covered in sports and Falcons memorabilia, including a signed jersey by wide receiver Drake London and a signed helmet from defensive tackle Grady Jarrett, who played 10 seasons for the team. Bowen was given a signed jersey by Robinson on Thursday and plans to add it to his collection. The third-year running back wrote on the No. 7 jersey that he was "praying for you" and to "keep smiling."

"The (Falcons) mean a lot to me," Bowen told the AJC. "I feel really good."

The past year has been tough for Bowen, who got an infection in February 2024 when a case of strep throat took a devastating turn, his family said. The infection entered his bloodstream, causing his body to go into septic shock, which led to the loss of his right arm.

Sepsis is a serious condition in which the body responds improperly to an infection. The infection-fighting processes turn on the body, causing the organs to work poorly, [according to the Mayo Clinic](#).



It altered the life of the active youngster, who played nearly every sport you can think of and still has a long road to recovery. The Booth Middle School student even had to relearn how to walk.

But the traumatic experience hasn't stopped Bowen from being a "glass half full kind of dude," according to his mother, Candace Harbuck, who also has three younger children.

"Through it all, he's never complained or cried about it," his mother said while holding back tears. "When his siblings came to him (to offer sympathy), he said, 'No, that's great. I only need one arm.'"

During his four-month hospital stay, family care representatives heard Bowen's story and what his dream would be. He was then selected by the nonprofit group Dream On 3 Georgia to receive a "Dream Experience," sponsored by Strack, Inc. and the Rosenberg Charitable Foundation. It was an all-expenses-paid trip to the draft in Green Bay to announce the pick.



Jodi Sonenshine of Dream On 3 presents Bowen Harbuck with a signed Atlanta Falcons jersey. (Ben Hendren for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution)

Candace Harbuck said they planned to fly to the draft Thursday and hang out near the stage for the first round, before heading to the city's zoo Friday. With so many hotels in the area booked, Dream On 3 Georgia managed to find an Airbnb host — a cancer survivor who was touched by Bowen's story — who gave them a discount, she said. In another stroke of luck, he's also a chef and will be cooking them meals.

Candace Harbuck said Bowen plans to wear a black suit and team bow tie Saturday when announcing the Falcons' scheduled No. 118 overall pick. There's always a chance the team trades that pick, but that just means Bowen will announce the next one.

Bowen said he doesn't think he'll be too nervous about going onstage in front of a national TV audience. He joked that he "might mess up (the) name on accident."

But on Thursday morning, the celebrations weren't quite done.

After getting the video from Robinson, Bowen walked with friends and family toward the front of the home, where they posed for photos with a massive 20-foot-long sign that read: "Happy Dream Day Bowen."

The cheerleaders then helped to usher him into a white stretch limousine on their cul-de-sac that was waiting to take the family to the airport. His smile growing bigger, Bowen remarked that it was the first one he had ever been in.



Bowen Harbuck (right) sits inside a limousine with his siblings Birdie and Barrett outside their home in Peachtree City. (Ben Hendren for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution)

The ride was the start of a special experience for Bowen following months of hardship. Bowen's father said he tells his son the hardest part of his life is over and that every challenge he meets "will be a drop in the bucket compared to what he's been through."

"There are a lot of great things for him in the future," Alex Harbuck said, his eyes watering up as he proudly gazed at Bowen outside their home.

"I love him. He's my son, but I always tell him. He's my hero."

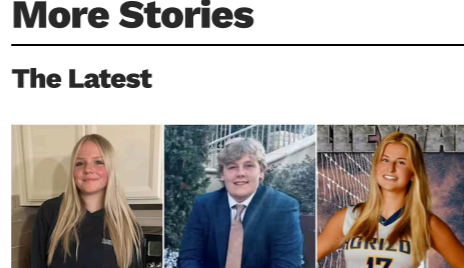
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David Aaro is a breaking news reporter for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

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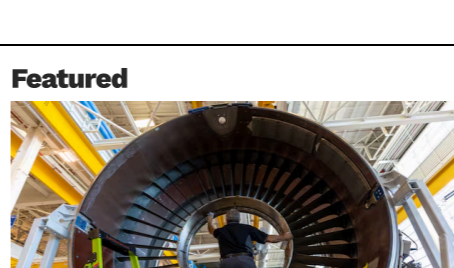


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