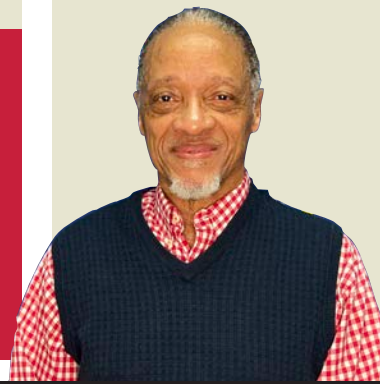


# THE ATLANTA VOICE



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**Tony Merritt  
shares his journey  
of living with HIV  
for 34 years.** PAGE 8

*AROUND TOWN*

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# The **A** is for amour

Atlanta United defensive midfielder Tristan Muyumba was born in Paris, France and now lives in Midtown, Atlanta. Asked if he is enjoying his new home after having lived here the past 6-7 months, he said, "I'm very happy and excited to be here." Muyumba is one of a handful of players the club will count on if there are going to get back to the league championship. United begins the 2024 at reigning MLS champion Columbus Crew Saturday. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice



# Metro



**ONLINE**  
Man accused of torching police motorcycles in attack authorities have linked to ‘Cop City’ protests

## ‘We have the team to win a championship this year’

BY DONNELL SUGGS

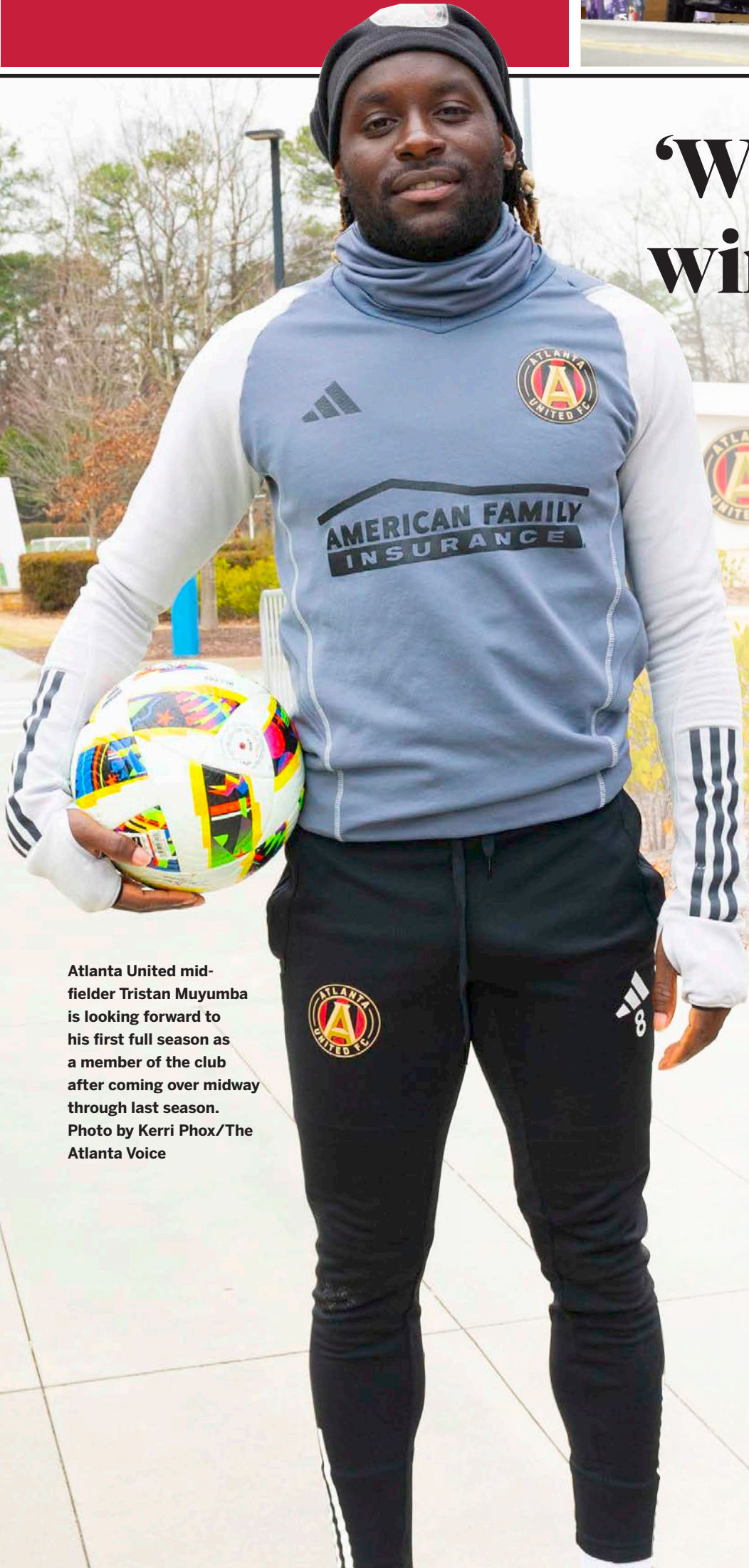
MARIETTA, Ga.-

**O**n a cool and slightly overcast Tuesday morning, Atlanta United players made their way through individual drills and team workouts along the grass fields at the Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta Training Ground. Arguably Atlanta’s best supported professional sports franchise, United was once again at the top of the attendance charts at the end of 2023, averaging a league high 47,526 fans per each of its 17 home games, according to sports data website Soccer Stadium Digest. One of the players cutting and juking back and forth on the field that morning was thrust into a graduate school level of learning just how crazy the support and fandom can be for the Five Stripes when he arrived last summer.

French defensive midfielder Tristan Muyumba, 26, is just days away from playing in his first Major League Soccer season opener. Muyumba made his official United debut during a Leagues Cup match against Cruz Azul last July 29 inside Mercedes-Benz Stadium. Coming to Atlanta from Ligue 2 club EA Guingamp, a respectable club in its own right, Muyumba was thrust into a fight for postseason position throughout his ten-game

See **MUYUMBA** on page 3

Atlanta United midfielder Tristan Muyumba is looking forward to his first full season as a member of the club after coming over midway through last season. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice



Muyumba, pictured during training Tuesday, Feb. 20, played in 10 games last season, starting nine. His skill on the ball immediately helped the club defensively. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice



MUYUMBA

Continued from page 2

start to life in Atlanta. Having started nine of the final 10 games of the 2023 season for United manager Gonzalo Pineda, Muyumba quickly admits that his move to Major League Soccer (MLS) was partly based on the league’s growing reputation and style of play. “The quality of players in MLS, especially the forwards, is a little better,” said Muyumba, who added that Ligue 2 could be a bit more physical.

Starting this season with Atlanta United, the 2024 campaign feels more like his rookie year in a way. He is getting to train with his teammates, some for the first time. A full start to the season has also afforded Muyumba the opportunity to play preseason matches with the club, the most recent being against fellow MLS side Sporting KC in Miami on Feb. 17. Learning a new city, new team, coaching staff, and new league can be difficult. Doing all that in the middle of the season even more so, he explained.

“[Last year] I did the preseason with my teammates, so we worked together, and I spent more time with them. So I was more comfortable than when you arrive during the season,” Muyumba said. “It’s different, but it’s a good difference.”

During the nine starts and 10 overall matches, Muyumba played 815 minutes, earning the trust of Pineda during crucial matches that United needed to win in order to remain in postseason contention. He scored his first career MLS goal in what would be a 5-2 victory over visiting Inter Miami on Sept. 16. The header came off of a pass from veteran United defender Brooks Lennon. The goal tied the match at one and



**Muyumba (above during a 2023 match at Mercedes-Benz Stadium) and Atlanta United made the playoffs last season, but lost in the first round to eventual Major League Soccer champions Columbus Crew. The two teams will meet again Saturday in Ohio for the season opener. Photo by Itorro N. Umontuen/The Atlanta Voice**

the United supporters went wild. Having played professionally in Belgium at the age of 20, and in France since he was 23, Muyumba understands the passion tied to soccer fans around the world, but United-level support excites him a bit.

Muyumba’s current three-year contract expires Dec. 31, 2026. He says he loves playing “In the Benz” and is getting familiar with his on and off-pitch surroundings. “Everyone in the coaching staff, in the locker room, every single person is very good, and for me it is a pleasure to be here.”

Muyumba began playing soccer as a young boy chasing af-

ter his older brothers. He would hone his skills on the streets of Paris while growing up and appreciates the hustle and bustle of a city like Atlanta. After all, having been born in the City of Light, and now being a professional athlete, Muyumba could afford to live anywhere in the city, but has chosen to live in Midtown among his new home’s midday traffic and bustling night light.

He said he enjoys the sights, sounds, and food.

“I feel comfortable here now, I’m very happy and excited to be here,” Muyumba said. “When I arrived I didn’t really know the league, so I learned about my teammates and the league, and I’m going to keep learning.”

Atlanta United opens the regular season at Columbus Crew, Saturday, Feb. 24 in a rematch of last year’s first round playoff matchup. The Five Stripes will make its home debut when it hosts the New England Revolution Saturday, March 9. Muyumba said one of the things he enjoyed about playing in MLS was how much every match mattered all season long despite there not being a relegation factor in American sports.

“We have the team to win a championship this year,” Muyumba said. “We have a lot of competitors on this team, and I think more of them being here is bringing experience to the team.”

A second United championship parade through downtown and Midtown could remind him of how they celebrate victories back home on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées. Muyumba thought for a moment and tugged at the shirt sleeves of his gray and white practice gear. “We have the quality and mentality to win in this league,” he said.

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# Sports



**ONLINE**  
New hope for sickle cell disease: FDA approved gene therapies Casgevy and Lyfgenia

## Disney Princess Half Marathon: A celebration of friendship and resilience

BY DONNELL SUGGS

**O**RLANDO, FL.- There were only two of them here now, but the other two were on their way. A quartet of first-time Disney Princess Half Marathon runners from four separate cities across the country were meeting for the first time at the starting line Sunday morning.

Their friendship started online with a Peloton group and now they were going to motivate each other in person and on the ground.

“We decided to use this race to meet for the first time,” said Kyra Norris, who made the trip to Orlando from Las Vegas. “Peloton brought us together, but Disney made us a family.”

Standing next to Norris was Tieshia Jones, who made her way to the meeting spot from her home in Arizona. “This is a two-fold celebration,” Jones, a breast cancer survivor, added. “We’re excited to get together.”

The third member of the group, Gary Cox, who also runs with a men’s group, Black Men Run, in his native Baltimore, showed up minutes later. “We travel as a pack,” he said.

One of the pre-race announcers shouted into his megaphone, “The hard part was getting here and you’ve already done that,” and this group was almost there.

Why people run Disney is always different. There are stories of breast cancer survival, weight-loss journeys, family get-togethers, first time trips to Disney, and people that just love to run. People like Yuri Ramirez, a native of Cuba that now lives in Orlando. She has run “five or six” Disney Princess Half Marathons and described her reason for being here again this year as simply for the love of running. And princesses.

“I love running, I love Disney, and I love runDisney because it’s very organized,” Ramirez said. She was wearing a white runDisney race jacket with 2022 on it. An experienced runner, Ramirez said she recommends this race to friends who want to find a fun race to do. Especially if they love princesses. “I love princesses too,” she said with a big bright smile.

One of the largest women-focused race events in the country, runDisney races allow participants to run through Disney theme parks while they are still empty. So there were many reasons to run the Disney Princess Half Marathon today or any of the other runDisney race weekends, which includes



Atlanta resident Robin Alexander decided to run her first ever half marathon at Disney Sunday, Feb. 25, 2024. “At this point in my life I might as well try,” she explained. Photo by: Donnell Suggs/The Atlanta Voice

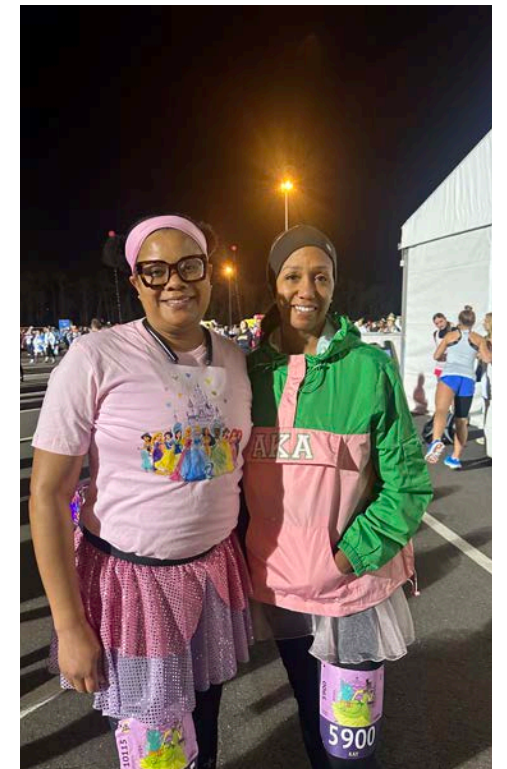
the Springtime Surprise race weekend on April 13-16. Nearly 170,000 people will have participated in runDisney race weekends this year, according to data provided by Disney. Their reasons are both different and similar.

People from across the country and around the world made their way to the starting line on a dark and cool Sunday morning. Among the thousands in attendance were 165 runners who have earned the distinction of being “perfect,” after having participated in each and every of the Disney Princess half marathons.

Kay Hughston and Tess Roberts of Fernandina Beach, Florida were not among the “perfect runners” trying to stay warm an hour before the race began. The friends were a part of a group of female runners that wanted to take on the challenge of a half marathon together.

“This is an opportunity to be in this with our other sisters,” said Hughston, who wore an Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. pullover over a pink tutu and running tights.

Roberts, who used to live in Atlanta, said she loves Disney and has run a number of half marathons, but this was her first Disney



Tess Roberts (left) and Kay Hughston, friends from Fernandina Beach, Florida. Photo by Donnell Suggs/The Atlanta Voice



Yuri Ramirez (above) has run in “Five or six” Disney Princess Half Marathons. “I love princesses,” she said. Photo by Donnell Suggs/The Atlanta Voice

Princess Half Marathon. “We love Disney,” she said.

A few feet away from them was Karen Bourne. Wearing a Princess Tiana outfit and working on a quick bite before the race,

Bourne looked every bit the part of a princess.

“I wanted to come here to celebrate our Black princesses,” said Bourne, who was in Florida from Silver Spring, Maryland. This wasn’t her first runDisney event, but it was her first Disney Princess Half Marathon. “I wanted to see what it was like. I wanted to get the energy and the positivity,” she said.

With Princess Tiana from “The Princess and the Frog” being featured all around the race grounds that morning, it would be hard for a Black woman to not be motivated. There were a number of Princess Tiana look-alikes amongst the runners on hand.

One of those Tiana lookalikes was Vee Johnson, whose dreads popped out over her shiny tiara. Johnson made her way to the Disney Princess Half Marathon from San Antonio, Texas and said she was here to advocate for veterans mental health.

“I want to inspire those who are suffering from mental health issues,” said Johnson, a veteran. “I also wanted to learn new habits and do new things.”

This was her first runDisney half mara-

See **RUN DISNEY** on page 11



# Politics



**ONLINE**  
Historic White House Gathering Celebrates Descendants of Civil Rights Icons

## Georgia Democrats push to get abortion rights on November ballot

BY ITORO N. UMONTUEN

**G**eorgia Democrats have pounded the drum in support of reproductive care and abortion rights. Wednesday, State Representative Kim Schofield held a press conference to highlight her House Resolution that would codify abortion rights into state law. House Resolution 836 would establish ‘a fundamental right to reproductive freedom and such right shall not be denied, burdened, or infringed upon.’ If it passes both chambers, it would go to the voters in November.

According to Schofield’s bill, it says every individual has a fundamental right to reproductive freedom that entails the right to make and effectuate decisions about all matters relating to pregnancy, including, but not limited to, prenatal care, childbirth, postpartum care, contraception, sterilization, abortion care, miscarriage care, and fertility care.

In states that have put abortion rights on the ballot, the voters have overwhelmingly turned out in favor of each initiative. For example, Ohio voters supported a measure that codified abortion rights up until the fetus is viable in November 2023. The right to abortion is available until 22 weeks. Also in Kansas, voters defeated a constitutional amendment by a 60-40 margin that, if it were successful, would have banned reproductive care and abortions.

“What we are seeking is work that saves



**Georgia State Representative Kim Schofield, D-Atlanta, speaks to legislation inside the Georgia State Capitol on Wednesday, February 21, 2024. Photo by Itoro N. Umontuen/The Atlanta Voice**

lives,” says State Rep. Park Cannon, a Democrat from midtown Atlanta. “So that is absolutely why over the past few years, we’re expressing that the bills passed have been because of late nights we have spent here asking questions. We will continue to stand on the record which is that just as much as the bill might be sponsored by a member across the aisle, they still need our votes to make it

move. And so if we move forward the rest of this legislative session with the understanding that the work that needs to get done is more important than who gets the credit. We feel like we’ve done the right thing.”

Georgia women are dying from pregnancy-related causes at alarming rates. The Georgia Department of Public Health’s latest Maternal Mortality Report found 30.2 preg-

nancy-related deaths per 100,000 live births between 2018 and 2020. With the overturning of abortion rights relative to the Dobbs decision, the effects go beyond abortion.

There is a spectrum of reproductive care, which is indeed part of ‘healthcare.’ At one end you’ll find individuals fighting for abortion rights, access to birth control, including Intrauterine Devices (IUDs). On the other end, couples are looking to start families and may be struggling to do so. In the middle, there are treatments for fibroids, endometriosis, and Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS). Every space within the reproductive care spectrum is rife with invasive and deeply personal questions.

With the Alabama Supreme Court decision that outlaws in-vitro fertilization, it is the latest example that many activists in Georgia believe that equal and equitable access to healthcare is the key to solving the maternal mortality crisis. Sherrell Byrd, co-founder and co-chair of SOWEGA, a civil rights advocacy group based in Albany, says women’s health can no longer be a partisan issue.

“Again, maternal care and maternal health is not a partisan issue,” says Byrd. “Everyone, I don’t care what your party is. I don’t care what your race is. Every woman should have the right to safely have their baby. So let the people decide. Let us decide on what we need instead of leaving it in the hands of people who can’t do it.”

## RUN DISNEY

Continued from page 10

thon. “I think running is a way to cope with mental health issues, especially for post-discharge veterans,” she said.

The same could be said for Alicia Frank, a Brooklyn, New York resident, and avid runner who was making her Disney Princess Half Marathon debut on Sunday. This race was on her bucket list and this weekend was her first time at Disney World. Running became a way for Frank to get out of the doldrums of COVID.

“I needed something to do in a bad part of my life so I started running 5Ks, and 10Ks and then I moved on to half marathons,” she said. That bucket list of races included the world famous New York City Marathon, but she checked that off her list last fall. Now she was on to Disney for the Disney Princess Half Marathon.

Former college basketball player Crystal



**Vee Johnson, a veteran, wants to advocate for mental health wellness for discharged veterans. Photo by Donnell Suggs/The Atlanta Voice**

Cleveland and her sister Jasmine were here too. A native of New Jersey now living in North Carolina, Crystal ran her first Disney Princess Half Marathon last year following the death of her grandmother. “I said that if I get in I was going to run,” explained Cleveland about last year. She completed the half marathon with her grandmother in her heart and this year the sisters will do it again as a team.

Atlanta native Robin Alexander stood by a large 13.1 and posed for her photo. Not a runner by nature or sport, Alexander was all smiles as she made her way to the starting line. “I have never done anything like this in my life,” she said. The 61-year-old grandmother said a friend raked her into applying and here she was. “At this point in my life I might as well try,” she explained.

From first timers to veteran runners, from breast cancer survivors to mental health advocates, there are so many reasons to run Disney.

Brittany Dobbs and Brittanie Denis were preparing to make their way over to the starting line. Dobbs, an Atlanta native and Florida resident, and Denis, her friend from Hawaii, who now lives in Florida too, were both dressed as versions of Princess Tiana. Denis’ neon green race top and matching tutu glowed in the dark of that morning. “She’s the one that signed me up for this,” Denis said. “I love to take on new challenges.”

Dobbs, who started running 5Ks to stay in shape a year ago, said she wanted a challenge that was a bit longer than three miles. “I wanted something to top it off,” she said.

Whether running 13 miles with friends, family, or with the ghosts of loved ones, the Disney Princess Half Marathon was full of stories.

**What's Next:** Registration for the Disney Wine and Dine Half Marathon weekend opens March 12. Go to [runDisney.com](https://runDisney.com) to learn more. Registration fills up quickly.