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Buffalo's Gill to coach at Kansas

Associated Press

LAWRENCE, Kan. -- Kansas hopes that Turner Gill can do for the Jayhawks what he did for Nebraska.

As a smooth option quarterback in the early 1980s, Gill was the difference-maker for the Cornhuskers, helping free them from Oklahoma's long domination and propelling Tom Osborne's program to the top of the Big Eight.

Later as an assistant coach, he helped develop a Heisman-winning quarterback and was a key member of the staff that led Nebraska to the 1994 national championship.

Kansas made the hiring official on Sunday and will formally introduce Gill as successor to Mark Mangino on Monday morning.

"I think Kansas has made a fine decision," said Osborne, the Huskers' former coach and current athletic director. "He will do a great job."

Mangino, the most successful Kansas coach in 100 years, resigned under pressure on Dec. 3 after a two-week investigation into alleged mistreatment of players. Just two years earlier, Mangino had been consensus national coach of the year following a 12-1 campaign and a victory in the Orange Bowl.

But misconduct has never been connected with the 47-year-old Gill, who has experienced nothing but success everywhere he's been. As head coach at Buffalo the past four years, he compiled a 20-30 record after inheriting a program with only 12 wins in the previous eight seasons. The Mid-American coach of the year in 2007 and 2008, he guided the Bulls to the MAC championship in 2008 and their first bowl game in half a century.

He called plays in 2007 when the Bulls set a school record with 424 points. A native of Fort Worth, he also proved effective in recruiting players in Texas -- something that is key to success for just about any Big 12 program.

He was the first man Kansas athletic director Lew Perkins interviewed after Mangino resigned under pressure with three years left on his contract.

Gill is the first African-American coach Kansas has had in a revenue-producing sport and will be the only black head football coach in the Big 12.

"I knew they were interested in him," Osborne told The Associated Press on Sunday. "I had a short conversation with Lew Perkins about him."



Turner Gill led the Buffalo Bulls to a MAC championship in just his third year on the job.

Perkins called Gill "a winner."

"His accomplishments at Buffalo speak for themselves. But more than that, everyone I talked to about him, starting with Tom Osborne, had the highest praise for Turner as a coach and as a person."

Osborne was best man at Gill's wedding and interviewed his close friend two years ago before hiring Bo Pelini as head coach. He said he ultimately decided on Pelini because the Huskers needed help most immediately on defense.

"He'll represent Kansas very well," Osborne said. "He has always been a success."

There was a time when the mention of Gill's name made Kansans wince. In his three years as Nebraska's starting quarterback, the Huskers beat the down-and-out Jayhawks a combined 150-28 -- 31-15 in 1981, 52-0 in '82 and 67-13 in '83.

But without question, it's a stronger program now in every way. After Mangino's 12-1 season in 2007, Kansas began an ambitious building program and now has more than \$30 million in new facilities, including weight rooms, training rooms and new practice fields adjacent to Memorial Stadium. Back in Gill's day, Kansas' antiquated facilities were among the worst in the nation.

"They're very definitely a good program," Osborne said. "They've really upgraded their facilities and put more into football."

Before Gill became Nebraska's starting quarterback in 1981, Oklahoma's Barry Swatter beat Osborne and the Huskers eight out of nine times, losing in 1978 and then taking the rematch in the Orange Bowl. Then with Gill running the offense, aided by wide receiver Irving Fryar and Heisman winner Mike Rozier at running back, the Huskers were 33-5 in three years. In Gill's senior season, the Huskers averaged 52 points and almost 400 yards rushing.

They beat Oklahoma three years in a row and Osborne had finally made his breakthrough against Barry Switzer and the Sooners.

"He was the great catalyst," Osborne said. "He brought out the best in everybody. He was maybe the best combination runner and passer we've ever had. And he had great leadership skills. I think the world of him."

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