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Bulls to replace Gill with national search

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- Challenging as it will be to replace coach Turner Gill at Buffalo, athletic director Warde Manuel knew this day would inevitably come.

What makes Manuel's job easier in finding a qualified successor, after Gill accepted an offer to coach at Kansas this weekend, is the remarkable job Gill did in bringing respectability to what had been one of nation's most laughable football programs.

The proof was evident on Sunday.

In the 12 hours since word leaked regarding Gill's departure, Manuel said he's received more inquiries from what he described as "quality" candidates than he did throughout his previous search in 2005, when he took a shot on Gill, a first-time coach, for a job very few expressed much interest in.

"I just have to feel that I won't get hung up as much or at all compared to where I was last time. It's a different job now," Manuel said during a press conference to discuss Gill's departure and Buffalo's plans to launch a national search for his successor. "Turner Gill has left this place much better than when he found it. For that I will forever be grateful."

The Bulls were transformed in four seasons under Gill. In finishing with a 20-30 record, he led Buffalo to its first Mid-American Conference championship last year, and took the Bulls to their first bowl game, a 38-20 loss to Connecticut in the International Bowl.

That's a remarkable turnaround for a team that, prior to Gill's arrival, went 10-69 since joining the MAC in 1999.

"He has brought Buffalo in a four-year period to places that I didn't expect so quickly," said Manuel, who wished Gill well at Kansas. "We'll miss all of that. But we will move on."

As his first step, Manuel named Bulls offensive coordinator Danny Barrett interim coach, and noted that the former Canadian Football League star quarterback is considered a candidate to take over the job on a full-time basis.

Though he declined to provide a timetable for the search, Manuel said he hopes to have it completed before the end of the bowl season, which runs through the BCS national championship on Jan. 7.

Barrett, who just finished his third season at Buffalo, will be the only candidate considered among Bulls assistants. He previously served as head coach and assistant general manager for the CFL Saskatchewan Roughriders. During a 14-year CFL career split with four teams, the Cincinnati product finished with 23,419 yards passing and 133 touchdowns.

The challenge for Buffalo is finding a candidate who had Gill's inspirational ability to change the losing culture in Buffalo, and also have the high-profile background to recruit players out of places such as

Texas. Gill, who's from Texas, was a former Nebraska star quarterback and Heisman Trophy finalist.

"I don't think I can replicate Turner," Manuel noted. "But what I want to replicate is somebody who cares as deeply about the kids, who has the knowledge and passion for the game."

Manuel acknowledged he had mixed emotions. Gill, after all, was the first coach Manuel hired upon taking over the AD job in August 2005.

"It's a mixed bag for me," he said. "Sad for us in Buffalo that he's moving on to Kansas, but for him and his family, I'm very happy. It's an exciting new chapter for him."

Bulls players accepted Gill's decision, understanding this was a good opportunity for their coach.

"He's moving on to a better place, bigger conference, a more prestigious school, so it's good for him," said quarterback [Zach Maynard](#), who was a first-time starter as a sophomore this season.

Added senior offensive lineman Peter Bittner: "You can't be mad because you realize how good an opportunity it is for him. And I couldn't be happier."

Buffalo school president John Simpson credited Gill for being a "remarkable leader."

"Turner has done a marvelous job rebuilding our football program and bringing positive national attention to the university," Simpson said. "We wish him and his family the very best."

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