



Powered by

'Moral stand' paying off for members of 1958 Buffalo team

By Erik Brady, USA TODAY

Gerry Gergley remembers what went through his mind when his 1958 University of Buffalo football team was invited to the Tangerine Bowl.

"It's cold in Buffalo," he thought, warming to the idea. "And we're going to Florida."

Only they didn't. Organizers in Orlando said the Bulls could not bring African-American players Willie Evans and [Mike Wilson](#). The team voted and said, under those terms, no thanks.

Now, more than half a century later, 34 of 41 living players, coaches and staff from the 1958 team are going to Orlando for Saturday night's game between the University of Central Florida and University at Buffalo, as UB is now known.

"We made a moral stand and we did what was right," Gergley says. "It wasn't a hard decision. They were our teammates. Willie was Willie, and we couldn't go without him, not to mention he was our leading scorer."

Buffalo was named top small-college team in the East in 1958, and the Bulls were invited to play Florida State in the Tangerine. It was the only bowl bid in UB history until last season, when the Bulls won the Mid-American Conference and earned a bid to the International Bowl in Toronto, where they lost to Connecticut. Members of the 1958 team went along on that trip, too.

"It wasn't warm, like Florida, but we had a great time," Gergley says. "We thought that would be the end of it."

But Orange County Mayor [Richard Crotty](#) wanted the region to make amends. He called UCF, which called Florida Citrus Sports, which runs the [Capital One](#) and Champs Sports bowls, to see what could be done for the 1958 Bulls when UB came to town. Loews offered to put them up at its Orlando resort. AirTran offered to fly them.

Gergley, 70, doesn't need airfare. Destiny brought him to Orlando long ago.

He was Buffalo's wrestling coach and an assistant football coach in the mid-to-late 1960s, until UB dropped football in 1970. (It returned in 1977.)

"So I went to a little school in Florida, only 1,000 students, to start a wrestling program," Gergley says. "It was called Florida Technological University then. Now UCF has 50,000 students and is one of the largest in the country."

He coached the Central Florida wrestling team to a 108-42 record from 1970-80. (It was disbanded in 1985.) He also started the men's golf program and assisted in the planning for the Knights' first football team.

Gergley was named to UCF's athletics hall of fame in 2003. He retired in 2007. These days he and wife Jacquie — high school sweethearts from Kenmore, a Buffalo suburb — split time between Orlando and the mountains of North Carolina.

"I'm a halfback," Gergley says. "I came from Buffalo to Florida — and now I'm halfway back."

Gergley was actually a fullback and linebacker on the 1958 team. Evans was the star halfback.

"My teammates want to give me credit (for the weekend's festivities)," Gergley says. "I just happen to live here and got old here."

The get-together in Toronto seemed like "our last ride together," in the words of [Jack Dempsey](#), a tackle on that team. Now, the 1958 Bulls ride again.

So for whom will Gergley root Saturday — UCF or UB?

"I started a Bull, and I became a Knight," Gergley says. "But Jack Dempsey tells me, 'Once a Bull, always a Bull.' "

That doesn't really answer it.

"Let's put it this way," Gergley says. "Either way, I can't lose."

Find this article at:

http://www.usatoday.com/sports/college/football/2009-09-16-buffalo-bulls-1958_N.htm

☐ Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright 2009 USA TODAY, a division of Gannett Co. Inc.



[Fantasy Joe:](#)

[Coaches avoid playing alma maters](#)

[Weekend Forecast: Texas, Florida gunning for payback victories](#)

Sep 17, 2009

Fifty years later, Buffalo players get trip to Orlando

08:38 AM

1 Comments

Recommend

The 1958 University at Buffalo football team turned down an invitation to the Tangerine Bowl when organizers in Orlando said the Bulls could not bring their African American players. This weekend the Bulls are finally getting that trip.

They will be special guests of the University of Central Florida when the Knights play Buffalo on Saturday. The story is covered [in Thursday's USA TODAY](#).

Here is some of what they are saying, courtesy of Central Florida's sports information office:

Richard Crotty, Mayor of Orange County: "When I heard the story of the 1958 football team, I wanted those men to know that Orlando has come a long way in 50 years."

Willie Evans, Buffalo halfback, 1958: "We appreciate the fact that there is interest in our story and that we are going to be honored at the game. More importantly, it gives us an opportunity to get together as a team one more time and we are grateful for that."

Steve Hogan, Florida Citrus Sports CEO: "It is with great pride that we finally get the chance to host the 1958 team here in Orlando as we intended to over 50 years ago."

Keith Tribble, UCF director of athletics: "While bowl berths usually come with joy and adulation, these men were forced to endure an unfortunate set of circumstances 50 years ago. We've put together a real special weekend for the team culminating with their recognition during halftime."

Warde Manuel, UB director of athletics: "Having our 1958 football team honored this way in Orlando is the final chapter in a story of courage, humility and redemption."

George O'Leary, UCF football coach: "I'm proud of our mayor, UCF and Florida Citrus Sports for inviting this team back to Orlando and to our game."

Turner Gill, UB football coach: "I am tremendously excited that the members of the '58 football team will be a part of our game at UCF. The members of that team have become like family for our football staff and team." - Erik Brady

Tags:

[University of Buffalo](#)

Previous[Coaches avoid playing alma maters](#)

Next[Weekend Forecast: Texas, Florida gunning for payback victories](#)

To report corrections and clarifications, contact Reader Editor [Brent Jones](#). For publication consideration in the newspaper, send comments to letters@usatoday.com. Include name, phone number, city and state for verification. To view our corrections, go to corrections.usatoday.com.

Guidelines: You share in the USA TODAY community, so please keep your comments smart and civil. Don't attack other readers personally, and keep your language decent. Use the "Report Abuse" button to make a difference. [Read more](#).

You must be logged in to leave a comment. [Log in](#) | [Register](#)

 ☐ Post this comment to Facebook?

Comments: (1) Showing: New: Most recommended!



[moneyman23](#) (0 friends, [send message](#)) wrote: 8m ago

I believe that this is a past overdue experience. This should have been implemented 50yrs ago. But all the while, i am elated, and exctied to see it happeneing now. As the saying goes, "Good things come to those who wait".

[Recommend](#) | [Report Abuse](#)