

---


UCF Forum

---

12-10-2014

## 'So You're Telling Me There's a Chance.'

Todd Dagenais  
*University of Central Florida*

 Part of the [Communication Commons](#), and the [Health and Physical Education Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/ucf-forum>

Information presented on this website is considered public information (unless otherwise noted) and may be distributed or copied. Use of appropriate byline/photo/image credit is requested. We recommend that UCF data be acquired directly from a UCF server and not through other sources that may change the data in some way. While UCF makes every effort to provide accurate and complete information, various data such as names, telephone numbers, etc. may change prior to updating. UCF welcomes suggestions on how to improve UCF Today and correct errors. UCF provides no warranty, expressed or implied, as to the accuracy, reliability or completeness of furnished data.

---

### STARS Citation

Dagenais, Todd (2014). 'So you're telling me there's a chance.'. UCF Today, 2014-12-10. Retrieved from <https://today.ucf.edu/youre-telling-theres-chance/>

This Opinion column is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in UCF Forum by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).



## 'So You're Telling Me There's a Chance.'

By Todd Dagenais  
UCF Forum columnist  
Wednesday, December 10, 2014

“So you’re telling me there’s a chance.”

I love movie lines. So many epic motivational themes about overcoming obstacles come from movies like “Braveheart,” “Rocky” and “Remember the Titans.”

Admittedly my opening quote doesn’t come from any one of these award-winning cinematic masterpieces. It comes from the much-less-appreciated classic “Dumb and Dumber.” Yet “a chance” has become a seven-year running theme for our UCF Volleyball program.

Nearly eight years ago I walked into a room of about 10 young women who just lost their coach and suffered through two humiliating seasons in which their conference record was 1-31. I was their new coach, and I was expected to make them a nationally competitive team. I knew that UCF was a great school, in a great location, and the athletic department had the full support of the university to be nationally competitive in all sports.

Therefore, I knew UCF Volleyball had “a chance.”

Sure, this was going to be the greatest challenge in my career. As a matter of fact, as far as we could tell, no team has ever become a conference champion in women’s volleyball in the years after suffering through a season with zero wins. Combined with the fact that all current and future team members would come from the often criticized “iY” Generation made – those younger Millennials born after 1990 – the challenge was even greater.

Would I be able to find enough players who didn't feel "entitled" or demand "guaranteed" playing time? Even if I did, would they have the athletic ability, talent and dedication necessary to do something that has never been done before?

Standing in that room, in front of those players, I made only one "guarantee." If they commit to being the best teammate they have ever been, if they are willing to work physically harder than they ever worked before, and if they commit to being the best possible students they can be, then I would guarantee them one thing: a chance.

The first team worked more than 1,000 hours in the gym, on the track, in the weight room, classroom, and tutoring sessions. They did everything I asked them to, and it gave them their chance. They won six conference matches, the most since moving to a more competitive conference. Most importantly, they planted the seed that would grow for the next six seasons.

Over the next five seasons every recruit heard the same speech. It went something like this:

"I make no guarantees. If you're willing to do everything that I ask you to do, then you will be rewarded with 'a chance.' That chance is to be a member of my team. If you are willing to train hard, make smart decisions, and earn good grades, then you may earn a chance to play. While playing, if you are able to perform well, handle the constant pressure, and manage performance anxiety then you may earn a chance to start. If I could get enough like-minded starters who share the same goals, then we would have a chance to win."

The 2008 team planted the seed, the 2009-2013 teams watered the seed, grew the plants, and protected them from the weeds. They were faithful to our core beliefs, ideals, and vision. They made lifelong friends, earned a wonderful education, traveled the country, but they never felt the satisfaction of being a champion. Those six teams were merely setting the table for the 2014 team to seize the ultimate chance.

The core group of the 2014 UCF Women's Volleyball team has been in place for nearly four years. In those years they practiced 22 weeks a year for 20 hours a week. They were also full-time students with extremely high academic expectations. The amount of hours that they have invested in the classroom, on the court, in the weight room, and in the athletic training room, numbered in the thousands. Yet, those hours guaranteed them nothing more than a chance.

However, we knew that with six seniors on our roster, this was the golden opportunity to make a major breakthrough if we prepared the right way.

We needed to do something special to prepare this team for the start of the 2014 season in August. In May, our team raised nearly \$40,000 and we took a team training trip to Winnipeg, Canada. While in Winnipeg we lived together, ate together, and trained against the Canadian national team every single day for a week.

Despite all of the money raised, all the training time, and a week's worth of competition against the Canadians, we were never guaranteed a successful fall season. It only gave us "a chance."

After we returned from Canada the players took a few weeks off and then reported back to campus to begin a summer term. Not just one or two players were there, but the entire team. Lifting and running in the grueling Florida heat and humidity can be relentless and demanding, but they suffered through it together. Still, all those hours on the track, and all those hours in the weight room, didn't promise us anything definite.

Our team reported to practice in early August with high hopes and great expectations. The coaching staff made a decision to play the toughest pre-season schedule possible to prepare us for the American Athletic Conference season.

As fate would have it, the first weekend of conference matches were on the road against SMU and Tulsa. Both teams were picked to finish in the top three in the American Athletic Conference. Somehow, we found a way to earn close wins both matches and started the conference season 2-0. This fantastic weekend may have given us the early lead in the conference standings, but we were far from a conference championship. Those two wins, however, did give us a jump-start.

Over the next eight weeks, our players went through the most intense practices and volleyball matches they have had in their lives. Each coaching staff member was working 80-100 hours per week watching film, creating scouting reports, and preparing the team to compete successfully.

Finally, on Nov. 23, we were standing face to face with "the chance." Seven years of work, thousands of hours of training, relentless belief that we would be in that position one day to do something special. That was the day, the day we had "the chance."

With four matches remaining in the regular season we had a two-match lead in the conference standings. A win against Houston meant that UCF Volleyball would defy history and officially go from “worst to first” in the conference. The match started at 7 p.m., and as you can see in the picture above at 8:46 p.m. we finally seized “our chance.” We finished the season at 25-7 and earned a spot in the NCAA tournament.

What you won't see in the photo is the 55 players, six coaches and several managers and staffers who unselfishly gave everything they had from 2008 to 2013 just so the 2014 team could finally wear the championship ring.

Those people never asked for guarantees. They just wanted to make sure at some time, in some place, somebody who had walked in their shoes would have that “chance.” We dedicate this conference championship to all of those people.

*Todd Dagenais is UCF's head volleyball coach. He can be reached [attdagenais@athletics.ucf.edu](mailto:attdagenais@athletics.ucf.edu).*