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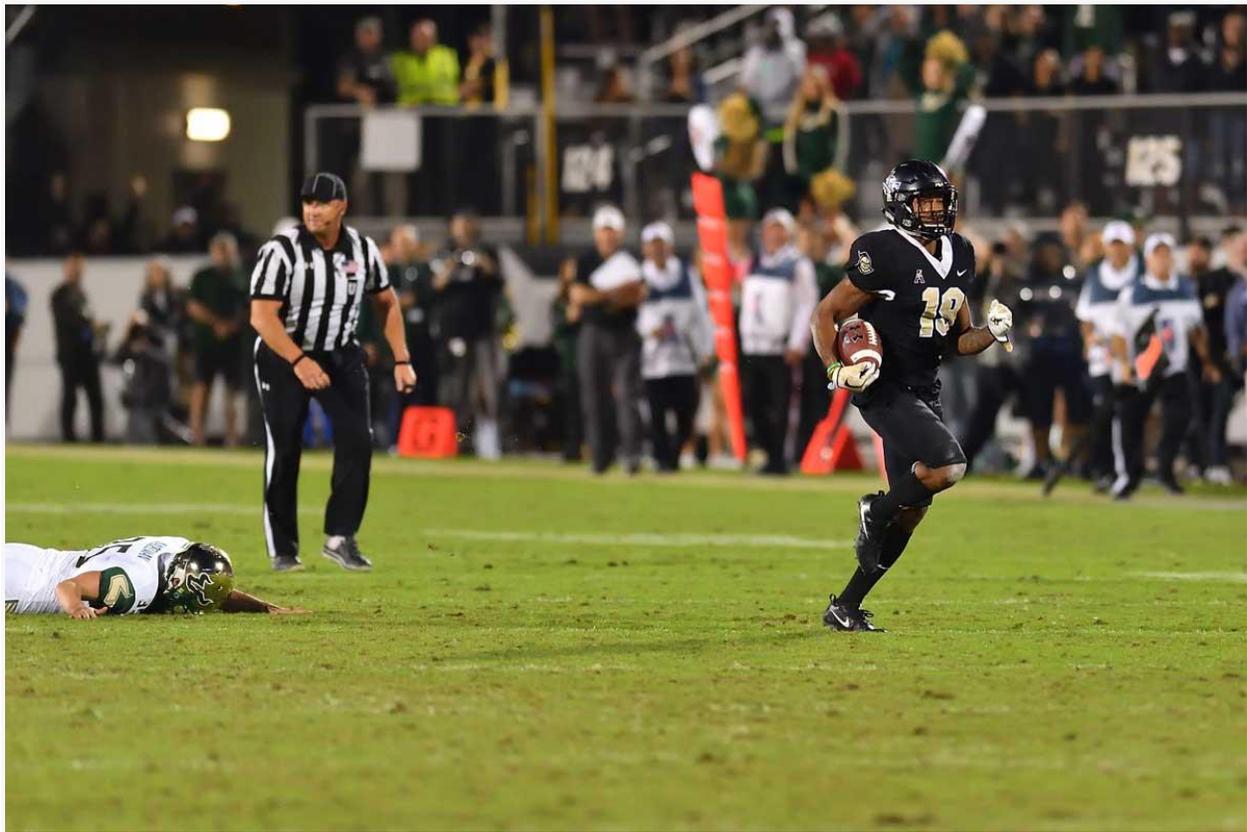
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The Irresistible Draw of Sports

By Marc Daniels
UCF Forum columnist
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There is no better moment than the one right before a game starts.



Marc Daniels' play-by-play call of Mike Hughes' game-winning touchdown against USF in 2017 has become one of the lines fans know him for. (Photo by Brad Helton, UCF Athletics)

When we read a book or watch a movie, we make a choice to accept the world we are about to enter. We know there will be heroes and villains. They will take us on a journey that will capture our attention and maybe even break our hearts. But the book or movie

has an ending already determined by someone else. It is up to us to avoid jumping to the final chapter or fast forwarding to the end to prematurely learn how it ends.

I am often asked what I love about my job as director of broadcasting for UCF. Is it a football game at the Bounce House? A basketball game on the road with a hostile crowd? A baseball game on a sun-soaked spring day? A soccer match with rivals squaring off and a conference title on the line?

The answer is yes to all.

The beauty of live sports is the element of the unknown.

But unlike the book or movie, the beauty of live sports is the element of the unknown. No matter how you think a game will go, no matter who you think will play a big role, you never really know what the journey will be like. And that is something I never get tired of.

For a football game broadcast, I spend six days preparing. The preparation includes watching the previous week's game. I study notes and numbers and learn as much as I can about the opponent for UCF. I talk to as many people as I can — student-athletes, coaches, support staff, the opposing team's radio staff, the list goes on — to gather as much information that will prepare for me for anything that may happen. And you know what? There are always things that happen that you never prepare for.

You might think a second-year quarterback from the high school that produced McKenzie Milton will have a big game, but you can never predict he will throw for a school-record 601 yards and five touchdowns like Dillon Gabriel did against Memphis on Oct. 17.

You can guess that the basketball team might be able to pull off an upset on the road, but not predict that one of the main reasons will be a player who comes off the bench to play the game of his life that elevates him to become the hero of an improbable outcome.

And the best scriptwriter cannot create the drama of what unfolded on the soccer field when a [coach is victorious in overtime over her mentor](#) to mark a memory to last a lifetime.

I have been fortunate to broadcast some of the greatest moments in UCF sports history.

In UCF's matchup at home against USF in 2017, [Mike Hughes returned a kickoff for a game-winning touchdown](#). Before that play, I had no idea what was about to happen. The game was tied at 42. The stakes for UCF could not have been greater. The Knights needed to win the game against their rival to advance to the conference championship game and keep hopes alive for an undefeated season and major bowl game.

When Hughes began his return, no one knew his path to glory. I was fortunate to have the best seat in the Bounce House and watch magic happen. Hughes made two moves to

fool would-be tacklers and then broke free — and at that moment everyone knew no one would stop him from reaching the end zone, where a sea of black and gold fans awaited.

As he broke free, I noticed fans begin their celebration and knew where he was headed. And without a script came the line:

“He’s got a reservation for six in the cabanas. He’s gone...TOUCHDOWN...BOOM!”

It just came out and it has become one of the lines fans know me for. But that was all the brilliance of the hero of the moment, Mike Hughes.

I began that morning hoping UCF was going to win. But how we got to the ending was the beauty of the day.

It doesn’t always go that way.

When I woke up the day the UCF men’s basketball team faced powerhouse Duke in the [second round of the NCAA Tournament](#), I was hoping for a chance in the end to pull off the upset. And to this day, I still don’t know how Aubrey Dawkins put-back shot didn’t fall inside the rim. The heartbreak still lingers. But that is the unknown that makes these games better than any written production.

Sports lets us root for teams and individuals who represent us. They come from areas near and far. But when they put on a uniform, they become one of us. They bring us joy and sometimes even bring us to tears. They will set records and they will make mistakes. They will win championships and they will lose in the final moments.

And that is why there is no better moment than the one right before the game starts. It is the unknown journey I can’t wait to see unfold.

Marc Daniels is the radio play-by-play voice for UCF Athletics and serves as director of broadcasting for the Knights. He can be reached at mdaniels@athletics.ucf.edu.

