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Change Brings A New Era to UCF

Marc Daniels

University of Central Florida, mdaniels@athletics.ucf.edu

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Change Brings A New Era to UCF

By Marc Daniels
UCF Forum columnist
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Change may not be easy, but sometimes change brings fresh ideas.



Terry Mohajir, UCF's new athletic director, and Gus Malzahn, the Knights' new football coach, are bringing their experience to campus. (Photo courtesy of UCF Athletics)

Change comes in many forms. Sometimes we choose to do something different. We decide to move or maybe commit to eating healthier.

Change can be as simple a new way to style you hair or can be as challenging as a new career.

UCF Athletics saw change in a big way recently when the school saw its athletic director make one of those big changes.

After five years in Orlando, Danny White took the same position at the University of Tennessee. White oversaw an incredible run at UCF. The football team became a national brand with its 25-game win streak. His claim of a national championship after the 2017 season made the Knights a story all across college football.

During his time at UCF, White oversaw numerous projects to upgrade facilities, raised money at a record level and became the face of Knight Nation.

For whatever reason White left – an opportunity presented itself, maybe he wondered if he had done all he could in Orlando, perhaps the frustration of college athletics that kept his school out of a larger conference – he decided to go.

His departure made many wonder, myself included: What was next for UCF?

We would soon find out.

White needed to hire a new football coach for Tennessee and he turned to someone he had recently hired – at UCF. Josh Heupel was offered and accepted the UT job. And just like that, UCF needed a new athletic director and football coach.

It is unusual that a school needs to fill both positions at the same time, and even more rare that an athletic director leaves a school then immediately takes the football coach with him.

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Athletic directors and top assistants across the country inquired about the leadership position and it's easy to see why. The interest was not just about the chance to live in a great city with warm weather year-round. It was about what UCF has become – not just a brand recognized in college athletics that wins on the field and in the classroom, but about a passionate fan base and a place that is not afraid to be cutting edge and create its own path and not just follow the action of others.

Terry Mohajir, who was hired as the new athletic director, came from Arkansas State, where he oversaw tremendous growth in revenue, ticket sales, championships on the field and success in the classroom. He also created opportunities for student-athletes after their playing days ended.

Mohajir's excitement and energy for the job was felt immediately when he was introduced. Even before that press conference he was busy trying to find a football coach.

He met with players and listened to what they wanted in a coach. As a former player, he watched film and spoke to other coaches and industry leaders. He quickly learned just how desired the position was. Current head coaches, top assistants and former coaches from college and the NFL wanted the job.

In the end, Mohajir turned to someone he worked with at Arkansas State. Gus Malzahn was in Jonesboro as the football coach when Mohajir was hired there in 2012. That year the Red Wolves won a conference title and Malzahn left to accept a new job as Auburn's head coach.

They will be reunited at UCF, where Malzahn believes UCF is getting the best version of the veteran coach. He brings experience, accountability and discipline and has an offense that should keep up the UCF tradition of playing fast.

Both hires have been nationally praised. The college football media saw the move as a perfect fit for both the coach and UCF.

The reaction says a lot about the UCF brand. It tells you how the school, athletic department and football team have grown through the years.



Marc Daniels (right) interviewed Gus Malzahn (left) at the football team's indoor practice facility shortly after Malzahn was announced as UCF's new football head coach. (Photo courtesy of UCF Athletics)

Change is not easy. But sometimes change brings fresh ideas. Change can inspire and energize not just those who are new, but also those who have been here to witness that growth.

A few weeks ago, UCF lost its athletics leader and football coach, and many wondered what was going on.

Today, Terry Mohajir's enthusiasm and vision is ready to lead the new era of UCF Athletics and Gus Malzahn believes the football team is just getting started with more championships to win and a playoff berth to earn.

I was fortunate to speak with both after their initial press conference. Mohajir is the person you want to be around and absorb his energy. He appears as someone who knows where he wants to go and wants you to come along for the ride.

Like Malzahn, the timing of the move to UCF seems perfect in his career. UCF's new football coach seemed like the guy getting back to his roots but at a place with unlimited potential. Malzahn loves coaching. He loves the competition and challenge. Leading the Knights seems like the moment he can get back to drawing up plays and outsmarting his opponents. I think he is ready to have fun and win big.

It's a great time to be Knight. The future is bright. So Charge On!

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.