

UFA 10

Interviewee: Charley Pell

Interviewer: Michael Gannon

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G: Hello. I am Mike Gannon and this is *Conversation*. This is the first program of our eighth season on Channel 5. Every Monday evening of the academic year we feature a conversation with a member of the University of Florida faculty or staff or with a visiting scholar who has come to our campus to lecture or conduct research. I hope that you will be a regular visitor to our channel at this day and time.

Perhaps kick-off is the most appropriate word to use this evening since this Labor Day weekend the University of Florida Fighting Gators open their 1982 season with an exciting victory over Miami. It is Florida's eightieth year of intercollegiate football counting all of the years except one, 1943 during the Second World War when the University did not field a team. The first ever game in which the University of Florida or its predecessor institution, the agricultural college involved itself in, took place in November 1901 against Stetson in Jacksonville. A rough surface field was trucked out there, goal posts were erected and 2,000 spectators took places along the sidelines. Stetson kicked off and Florida returned the ball almost to mid-field. On the first play from scrimmage, a Florida player stumbled over a tree root and lost the ball. Stetson recovered and marched down the field for the only touchdown of the day. Stetson won the game 6-0 and with it, the state championship. My friend, Florida historian Sam Proctor, tells me that it was just at that moment that the university's most hallowed tradition was born, "Wait 'till next year!" Now, many experts say next year has finally arrived.

My guest on this *Conversation* is head football coach, Charley Pell. We have not seen "next year" after three-quarters of a century, but we have seen some good Florida teams over the years including some that one might call great. I think, for example, the 1928 team that went 8-1 and came one point of going to the Rose Bowl, perhaps for the National Championship and the 1952 team which was our first bowl team, Gator Bowl. In 1960, Florida went 9-2, in 1966, it went 9-2 again and went to the Orange Bowl. In 1969, the Gators went 9-1-1 including a win in the Gator Bowl over the SEC Champion Tennessee. Now, it is 1982. Many people are saying this can be one of those all-time great Gator teams. If that is so, what kind of pressure does that put you under?

P: It seems that we have had this for quite some time. You mentioned the 1928 team. It is interesting to note that in 1929, Alabama started a Rose Bowl thing of three years. That was when the Alabama winning tradition began. I often wondered and discussed this with other Florida people, what would show in history had Florida been able to go to the Rose Bowl and win and go back again the next year and maybe a couple of years go back to the Rose Bowl. Florida

football would have a completely different history because they could have that same tradition that belongs to so many other schools. The year of the Gator will only come when winning becomes a habit. I am not sure if that is true yet. We have a fine offensive football team. I think that is our strength this year and we are going to have to live with that until we can fill in some of our slight places on defense that have occurred even since spring practice. I think this defensive group is going to be stronger than the group last year. Right now, we are really behind where we could be and where we thought we would be at this time. We are really going to have to struggle, particularly in the defensive line where we have an inexperienced senior and two sophomores. John Whitaker is an outstanding worker and is going to be a fighter. We missed quite a bit and Tim Newton is an inexperienced sophomore. Allison Jones has had very little playing time. They are going to be something, they really are, but right now, we are struggling.

G: You have momentum built up. You said that if the 1928 team had been able to develop momentum, the 1929 record would probably have been very different. It would have been a very different spirit behind what Florida was able to show. With a win at the very first game of the season, does that not give you a particular momentum just as I would wonder a loss would take away a certain edge? I think that last year when you lost to Miami on that field goal, I would call it a fluke where the ball hit the cross bar. Danny Miller's field goal could have gone either way. It went one way over and gave Miami the win. Did that create a proven and inevitable mood among Florida players just as this latest victory creates a certain mood of optimism and confidence? What is the meaning after the first game of a season?

P: I really believe that the first game of the season, whatever happens, whether it is a loss or a victory or a tie, affects the team about the same way depending upon maturity. I am not saying physical maturity or age, I am talking emotional maturity. The 1977 Clemson team, we lost our first game 20-14 and we came back and had an outstanding year and won eight ball game after we had only won five in two years. The team became very mature as the year went along. They were able to handle and cope with things much better. We were discussing the Southern Cal team that Coach McKay took to Arkansas several years ago. Arkansas beat them very handily, but Coach McKay felt like that was one of his best football teams. We are talking about first games and Southern Cal went back to California and went on and won every game after that and the national title. Arkansas fell apart and had one of the worst records they had in ten years. More people are looking to a trigger, maybe something to say, this is magic. This is the thing that turns it and gets that rock rolling. That is not the way a first game is. All that counts is, and I tell the players, it is like climbing stairs, that(the first game) only means one step and we are at a position to take the second step. The top is not there and very much closer. Unfortunately, there is no magic to football. It is emotional, tense and demanding sport in every respect. The emotional maturity of a team has more to do with what happens in a first game break than the outcome of it.

- G: Perhaps more than the physical condition, what is the relationship between emotional maturity and physical condition? Have you ever worked out that equation?
- P: No, I think a youngster can be emotionally immature and erratic and still be in good physical condition. Emotional maturity does not have a thing to do with age. We have had some fifteen-year-old players just coming out of high school more mature than some graduating seniors. You have seen this in grad students too. The maturity I am talking about is the ability to take a win and not let it go to the head or to take a loss and not let it drag them down or not let the environment affect them. A student body gets so excited with a victory and after awhile, a player hears is people saying that he is so good and the team is so good, he forgets that the opponent could really could care less. They could care less about what they think because they are going to try to knock their heads off.
- G: Gator fans groan during the spring, summer and fall when they learn of how many players have fallen victim to accidents or disciplinary problems. Many wonder, as I wonder, if this is something that afflicts all teams in the conference or if Florida is particularly vulnerable to this kind of loss of key personnel.
- P: **Leo McKeaver** was playing basketball in Florida Gym during January and was injured. He was operated on then and rehabilitation has been slow. Most schools have those types of accidents. The car accident that Kyle Knight was involved in, he was going to Fort Lauderdale for the weekend, that happens to everybody everywhere. The disciplinary problem is a sometime thing. Roy Harris has a lower back problem. He injured it lifting weights in the summer. To say that other schools have that happen to only one unit, the defensive unit, I would say it is very rare. I would have never anticipated that. We expected McEaver, Kyle Knight, and Victor Bradley to be healthy for the first day of practice. The rehabilitation program took longer than we thought. Now we find ourselves almost patching up areas that we had anticipated in June of being very strong.
- G: *Sport Magazine* picked the Florida Gators number one. I do not believe you took that too seriously, but there was an interesting article about the Florida Gators in that magazine in which the writers said that the SEC is known for smart scheduling. The writers say, "conference powers in the SEC live and let live and beat up on the passes." I wonder what is so smart about Florida's schedule this year when you play Miami and Southern Cal back to back, Mississippi State and LSU back to back and then Georgia and Auburn back to back and have three open dates. You have said yourself that you have not done exceptionally well after open dates.
- P: Mr. Cook did say that about the Southeastern Conference powers, and he is talking about Alabama and Georgia, has dominated the SEC Championship for the last eight years. There are some very serious questions about why Alabama and Georgia do not play each other. I say, more power to them. They were

intelligent enough not to schedule each other. If they can do okay in their respective little channels in the league, then one of them is going to be the champion. Maybe they will tie or finish close, one or two for the last six or seven years practically. That is smart scheduling. He was not claiming that we had scheduled smartly, he was saying that the conference powers, Alabama and Georgia were in the power seats and the rest of us were in the chased position. Mr. Cook also said that he was gambling and he was really taking a longshot. I get a big kick out of this, he says to our news people that it is interesting that you would market the *Sport Magazine*. They would probably sell more issues of *Sport Magazine* in the state of Florida than in the history of publication. You have to know, and Mr. Cook knows, the population of Florida and he knows the state university and he knows they are mostly Florida people. He gets free marketing and did not spend a penny on advertising by simply selecting the Gators. It is interesting how many people have used the word *Sport Magazine* and how many times you and I have used it tonight. They do not pay one copper cent of commercial tax.

G: That is great insight.

P: Mr. Cook knows what he is doing.

G: Florida football's commitment to academics has been something very noteworthy during your tenure in office as head football coach of the university. I remember when you first arrived and in your very first press conference, you said an answer to a question that if you had a football player who was potentially All SEC and potentially Phi Beta Kappa and he only made All SEC, you would think you would have failed him. You have lived up to that with everything that I have seen. The academic program, the advisement of students is a very strong one and I would like to congratulate you for what you have done. The emphasis is on students and the student-athlete equation and, to a larger extent, probably the best that we have ever seen in Florida football.

P: That is very important. It is very critical to athletics, not just college football, but it is important to athletics and the credibility that we establish. Some people get the idea, and I find this true with a lot of young people, that they think that football is a way. Football is just a means, it is like a big old lever where they learn to achieve and sacrifice and lead. General MacArthur has claimed that football is one of the things he feels is the greatest teacher of mankind for leadership. There have been army generals saying that if he had a tough assignment, he wanted a West Point football player. History shows it. We do not want to get confused. Academics is the reason for going to college, to get a degree. We tell our people that the priority of graduation and football is that only one percent of the high school graduates make it to professional football. The average career for an NFL player is less than four years. When football is over with and the good Lord, the doctor or the coach says no more football, where are we? That is going to judge Charley Pell's program at the University of Florida. What is he prepared to do and does he have a degree, does he have a preparation for

his future? If he does, our programs are on the right track. We are going to start graduating the highest percentage that has ever been here at Florida. I am very proud of that. It has not been an easy road and it will never be easy because this is a great university and I have coached and associated with five different universities. This by far and away has the greatest academic demand, the greatest academic credibility, the greatest academic reputation, which means that the degree means more. I am very proud of that. I am proud to see our players beginning to see [that]. It is amazing to see a youngster in his sophomore year begin to see that he can graduate, he can get a degree, and we see the difference even in his conversation about his personal life and his future.

Football is important to these people and it is important to a lot of us, but education is the difference. I cannot stress that enough. This is not recruiting talk because I am not recruiting. This is an explanation and reinforcement of what we said four years ago. Academics is the purpose for a youngster to be in college. We tell a recruit if he is not interested in getting his degree, we do not want him to come to the University of Florida because he will not be happy. He will be in a different environment than what he would probably enjoy.

G: In that connection, four years ago, the NCAA through a basketball oriented ruling, permitted football teams to redshirt freshman. Some universities started quite a feud, University of Washington, for example, redshirted twenty-three men with a result that this year they are now the first team members of the Huskies and they are at the same age as NFL rookies. Other schools, I think of Notre Dame, for example, decided not to do that. Father Hesberg, the president of that university said he thought it was unfair to a young man to require him to spend five years in college to secure a degree that he was able to obtain in four. What is your own reaction to that practice?

P: I think if a youngster can attain his degree in four, it is perfectly all right. If you take an engineer, that is almost impossible to get that degree in four years. Any of the highly technical [majors] where there is a tremendous number of labs and there is also some sequence of courses that are difficult to get. I think it is difficult for an athlete to graduate with a four-year degree. We never really believed in the redshirt route. I believe very strongly for an injured player who cannot play, he wants to have the opportunity. But, we have not have a redshirt policy. Gary Ellis we redshirted. In 1978 in Florida, Bob Hugo was redshirted, Chris Faulkner was, Fernando Jackson was, and John Merker was. You also remember that was a very difficult year for Florida football and had they been able to play, we would have played them. It was not because you were showing a lack of ability. Some people think that is a way you hold a great player back. I have always had the impression that we have been rebuilding. Maybe someday we will get to the point where we can hold people the ability back. If they are good enough to play, they can play in our program.

G: I noticed that John L. Williams played in the very first game of the season for the Florida Gators.

- P: He earned it. We could redshirt John L. this year. Right now, we do not plan to redshirt Donnie Glydee, the freshman quarterback because I think it is important for him to get in some junior varsity games during his freshman year. The NCAA did allow the freshman to play for junior varsity games that did not cost a year of eligibility. That would make more sense.
- G: Florida Field with its new end zone seating, I wonder if that new seating did not cut down on the breeze. You had the hottest day on record not only because it was a warm day but also because it is a closed in arena.
- P: We have a breeze on the field. It was a swirling wind. It is a beautiful facility. Underneath is the training center which we dedicated to Ben Hill Griffin. That is the one that we are so proud of.
- G: The most famous thumb in America and will he be playing tonight, Herschel Walker?
- P: I have no idea at that point. I have become a cable news television fan because I can watch the news quicker on that than I can read in the newspaper. I have not had time to read the paper recently. The doctors think he can. He is a player. He is a thorough-bred.
- G: Do you want to pick a winner tonight?
- P: Georgia should win it. Georgia should have won last year. They had eleven turnovers. If Georgia does not have eleven turnovers, they should win. I would have said the same thing a year ago.
- G: The future of the Miami series, that is, the University of Florida and Miami Hurricanes?
- P: My boss, Bill Card, is in the process of preparing a statement for tomorrow's press conference. He is busy with the president and discussing that we want the Miami series continue. We want it very badly. We never intended anything else. It just came to a point where we feel a responsibility to our team, Florida fans, our people, our big bond issue in the south end zone that we have to pay off. There is a big debt that we have assumed. We have to look at this thing as a very serious, responsible matter. We will make our proposal with these thoughts in mind. Scheduling is not something you do at a flip of a hat or a discussion over a coffee table. It is a long study thing. You go into a four-year contract and it has to be worked out. A lot may effect the program like the season ticket sales, are we going to have Florida State stay at home, are we going to have Florida stay at home and Miami home in the same year or away in the same year? All of these things are important. We are suffering through some situations now playing LSU and Mississippi State back to back and on the road the same year and at home the same year. Scheduling is a very critical part of a program that has to have a design and a purpose. That is the proposal Bill Carr is working on right now. We want the series to continue.

- G: The Southern Cal tradition.
- P: More National Championships than any football team in American history. That is the one thing that bothers me about preparing for this team coming up, the Southern Cal tradition. That is something that we are going to have to beat in addition to the players we line up against.
- G: It is a mental battle against that tradition?
- P: Yes. We are wanting a tradition. We want that and we want winning to become a daily, weekly, annual habit and not an accident. Southern Cal played their first football game in 1888. They are not a late starter.
- G: Any connection with the Southern Cal game? The heat? The game has been advanced to 4:00. What affect will that have on Southern Cal's team, what advantage might it give to the Gators?
- P: They are flying in here Thursday night. They will be here all day Friday and they will have Saturday before the game to familiarize themselves with the climate and the situation and get over the jet lag. They will have air conditioning units on the sidelines. It is very possible that we will have a 4:00 thundershower which will cool everything down. If it was last Saturday, it would be a factor, I will agree to that, no questions. We have just as much chance of it being cool. We are not going to the bank depending on the weather.
- G: Returning to the Miami game, the great catch of James Jones and was that really the play of the game?
- P: It was the play that got the attention. The play that made the difference in the game was on the third down and five. Miami had the ball, completes it to rush their tailback in between Reuben Marshall and Fernando Jackson. There is this big collision. His helmet goes one way, the ball goes another way and it is fourth down and five. Now they are really under the gun. Kelly (Jim Kelly) comes back to pass, the rush forces him out of the pocket, he has to throw it away. It is our football with one minute to go so that we can run the clock down. That may have been, from a coach's standpoint, the play. If he had rushed and held onto the ball, it would have been first and ten with a minute to go. It was Jim Kelley with the football and with his ability to throw it. One play could have made all of the difference in the world.
- G: If anyone is praying in the stadium that day, surely the answer to the prayer was Jones' catch. Without his contact lenses and carried by defenders on every side, one hand in the air and he brings in the ball. That has to be a great moment in his life and the life of the Gators.
- P: The only person in the world who was more active in his work and wanted to see that happen was his mother, Mrs. Grace Jones.

G: She was in the stands that day?

P: She was there. She does not miss a game. She is a great fan.

G: That is won of the things you tell parents that if their sons come to the University of Florida, they will be able to see them play. That is a great recruiting advantage that you have. I know that you do and your whole staff takes great care to keep in touch with parents and advise them with the progress of their sons in academics as well as athletics.

P: The office of student life is the key to that. They are the bridge, the communication to the players and parents in their particular areas of need. We ask the office of student life to assist us in identifying problems and work on the solutions. It is a counseling unit and they work very closely with that department. We have several of Dave Whitmer's graduate students who work in the program and it is great for us.

G: Charley Pell, thank you for being with me on *Conversation*. Good luck next time.