



# THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

August 16, 2022

## 2022-2023 Board Members

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## Coach Will Healy and 49er Football!

by **Rick Handford**

**Dale Halton** introduced Coach Will Healy, who became head coach of the UNCC 49rs football team in December of 2018 when he was 37 years old and the second-youngest coach in Division I football. In 2019, his first full season with the team, he led Charlotte (7-6; 5-3 in C-USA) to school records for most wins (7), most Conference USA wins (5) and most home wins (5) while advancing to the school's first bowl game. The 49ers upset Duke in 2021 for their first win against a Power 5 team. Dale noted that the coach embodies the Charlotte football motto of PEEP, which stands for Passion, Energy, Enthusiasm, and Positivity.

Coach Healy demonstrated the enthusiasm and energy that he is famous for during the entirety of his talk. He feels good about this team going into this year, with upgrades to his coaching staff on both sides of the ball. He has been dealing with coaching turnovers for the last seven years and is looking to establish a program and provide some stability going forward. He is working to increase the support for the team in the Charlotte area, and invited us not only to attend games, but to come to practices and visit the campus and the athletic facilities.

He talked about his coaching career, from his seven years as an assistant at Tennessee Chattanooga to his first head coaching job at Austin Peay. When he took the Job in 2016, Austin Peay ranked 256 out of 256 Division I programs, having a record over the previous four seasons of 1-45, had lost its last 29 games, and was 0-11 when he arrived. He told the team the situation was bleak—they were 0-11, their chant was “Let’s go Peay”,

and their uniforms were from Russell Sportswear. None of this was cool. He acknowledged to the team that he could do nothing about 0-11, and could only not himself say “Let’s go Peay”, but that he could move from Russell to Under Armour for the uniforms.

With that great start, he went on to recruit the best class in the Football Champion Subdivision in 2017 (according to Yahoo! Sports) and deliver an 8-4 winning season, with three of the four losses to schools in the Football Bowl Subdivision (what we would call the Big Boys). He had a number of great stories about how he changed the perpetual loser into a consistent winner, and about his plans to advance the Charlotte program going forward.

In response to questions, Coach Healy said that the extension of the light rail from uptown to the campus was good for the students and was a positive factor in recruiting. Students can ride the train for free, allowing them to easily access center-city amenities, including the sports venues. It serves to reduce the disconnect between the university and the city. He loves the facility and the home field environment, described as the best in Conference USA. They are currently looking for Charlotte fans to grow that experience—even if they are your second team. When your school is playing in some remote location, come to see a quality football game at Charlotte! The experience will only get better as they embark on an \$82 million expansion of the stadium and double its capacity, which is currently the smallest in FCS football.

On the subject of Name, Image, Likeness (NIL), he said that he was happy to see that student athletes can now be paid within the rules. He would like to see more NIL funds available to his players, preferably through internship programs with local businesses, but also through other avenues. Many of his athletes, while on full scholarships, still come from low-income families and don’t have much money to cover expenses. Any program that could get some funds to these players would be welcomed. He would love to see funding to enable remote families to come to the occasional game and to attend graduation; and would also like to experiment with incentives for academic performance in the form of bonuses tied to GPAs, say \$1,000 for achieving a 2.5%, and \$100 more for each additional 0.1%.

He acknowledged that the Transfer Portal and NIL make recruiting and retention more difficult, especially when some FCS schools are able to offer six figures for elite players, and some FBC schools can go to seven figures for top performers. That being said, it is how the world is structured now, and he has no option but to deal with it. Good players and coaches are being recruited all of the time, and he has to provide a vision and a program that people will stick with in spite of financial incentives to go elsewhere. Fortunately, he has a number of players and coaches who fit that description.

Charlotte needs to play with larger and better schools in order to increase exposure and revenues, and to expose the players to higher levels of competition. The downside is the potential for more injuries when going up against bigger and faster competition (Another great story about a game between Austin Peay and the University of Georgia here). He and his staff work to prepare the players to minimize the downside and take advantage of the upside.

This brief summary cannot capture the flavor of Coach Healy's talk, and I encourage you to see it on the Club's Website, <https://vimeo.com/user24733153> . I would also join the coach in urging you to experience a game and root for the Charlotte 49rs!

\*A recording of the program is available here: <https://vimeo.com/740142880>  
The speaker's introduction begins at 13:08 minutes.