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UCF KNIGHTS SPORTS

UCF brothers Tre and Devin Nixon grateful for surprise final season together

 By **STEPHEN RUIZ**
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UCF wide receivers Devin, left, and Tre Nixon had been teammates from the time they started playing football all the way through high school in Brevard County. (Courtesy of Jeannie Meranda)

When Tre and Devin Nixon were younger, they did not have to go far for a good time.

All the boys had to do was grab a football, walk outside and start throwing. Sometimes, the ball spiraled. Other times, it fluttered. The trajectory wasn't the object, though.

No matter how the ball arrived at its destination, the boys grew closer with each toss.

"I've got pictures of them in the backyard playing football, and that was nonstop," said the Nixons' mother, Jeannie Meranda. "Their dad put a football in their hand as soon as they could hold one. Devin used to be the quarterback.

Tre used to be the one running. If our friends were over, they'd both beg someone to throw the football so they could both be receiver types."



Devin, left, and Tre Nixon are shown as teammates at Viera High School. Devin transferred from Western Kentucky to play football at UCF, one year after his brother left Ole Miss to join the Knights.(Courtesy photo)

The Nixons are about to embark on their final season together, a football fantasy that once seemed improbable. Both originally left Viera High School in Brevard County to play college football out of state before reconnecting as wide receivers at UCF this year.

Devin, a redshirt senior, transferred from Western Kentucky after graduating with a degree in sports management. He joins a receiving corps that already included Tre, a redshirt junior who played two seasons at Ole Miss before switching schools last year.

UCF will open the regular season against Florida A&M at 7:30 p.m. Aug. 29 at Spectrum Stadium.

"It's just a special feeling," said Tre, who produced 40 catches for 562 yards and four touchdowns during his first season with the Knights. "It makes you want to go harder, just seeing your brother out here."

The flashbacks come easily.

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Tre and Devin were once Titans, the nickname of one of their youth-league teams. Tre grew up rooting for the Baltimore Ravens, especially his favorite player, Hall of Fame linebacker Ray Lewis, while Devin gravitated toward the Indianapolis Colts and Peyton Manning. Their father, Anthony Nixon, was their first coach.

The brothers split their childhood between Mesa, Ariz., where their father resides, and Florida.

"Growing up, we're out there grinding together, whether it's ladder drills, throwing passes to each other, but just doing that with somebody you're really close with, it really pushes you while you're doing it," Tre said.

Said Devin: "We always got fond memories there."

When the Nixons joined the football program at Viera, the Hawks had not reached the playoffs since the school opened in 2006. That changed in Devin's senior season and Tre's junior year in 2014 when Viera — led by current UCF backup QB Hayden Kingston — captured its first district championship.

They lost in the first round but returned to the playoffs the next year, eventually falling 45-10 to Fort Lauderdale St. Thomas Aquinas in the Class 7A championship game in Orlando.

"Just every day, both of them had a smile on their face," said former Viera coach Kevin Mays, who now coaches at Baker County High near Jacksonville.

"They came here, no matter what it was we were doing. It was hot, cold, whatever it was. They didn't

Wide receivers Gabriel Davis, left, and Tre Nixon are UCF's top two returning targets in the passing game. (Joe Burbank/Orlando Sentinel)

let stuff get in the way. They were great, awesome kids to be around."

Devin (6-0, 190) left Central Florida to play at Western Kentucky, a Conference USA member. Tre (6-2, 180), a four-star recruit coming out of high school, departed for the bright lights and raucous crowds of the SEC.

It was the first time since the brothers were 5 or 6 years old that they were not on the same team.

"I'm sure it was a culture shock," Anthony Nixon said. "It gave them an opportunity to grow up, to find out who they really were, to look inside themselves and find out if this game is for them."

Each brother left his first college with one career reception.

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Tre emerged last season in UCF's fast-paced offense, and he and Gabriel Davis, the Knights' top returning receiver, again should be key components in the passing game.

UCF receivers coach Darrell Wyatt said Devin has been working out of the slot and could have a role on special teams.

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"[Devin's] kind of like, 'Do I come back to play football, or do I move on with my career?'" said Meranda, who lives in Viera. "I'm glad he stayed, because, 'I can't pass this opportunity up. This is my brother. This is my last time to play with him.' It really touches my heart."

The brothers are excited, too.

"I played with him before," Devin said. "It was unexpected, and I'm playing with him again. Just go out with a bang."

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Stephen is an online content editor and sports writer for the Sentinel. He is in charge of the home page for the website in the morning and writes sports features, mainly on endurance sports such as running and triathlons. Stephen enjoys rooting for the New Orleans Saints and Houston Astros, working out, reading and cooking. He graduated from LSU.

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