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UCF fans react to 'The Cardiac Knights' this season

Keira Gilmore

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With over 42,000 fans present on Oct. 12 for the annual Military appreciation game, the Knights lost to the Bearcats 19-13, adding to the five-game losing streak they suffered from this season.

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As football season comes to a close, the Knights have had their fair share of ups and downs, with an overall record of 4-8 and 2-7 in conference play.

With that came dramatic reactions from UCF fans, as the Knights sadly lost their bowl eligibility this season for the first time since 2015.

“I went into this season with some real expectations,” Brandon Kravitz, radio host for 96.9 The Game in Orlando said.

Kravitz had the opportunity to talk with former UCF football player and Hall of Fame Inductee Shaquem Griffin on his show this past October. In the interview, Griffin said that he feels UCF is losing sight of the culture.



As this tweet sparked a reaction on X, receiving over 66,000 views, UCF fans also reacted to the football team they saw on the field this season.

“This year I’ve seen two different teams, or technically four teams now because we’ve played four different quarterbacks,” Adolfo Valdes, UCF alumnus and football season ticket holder, said.

This season, UCF started three different quarterbacks before finally starting redshirt freshman quarterback Dylan Rizk. The Knights, however, have also lost many recruits this year due to what fans believe is the performance they are seeing on the field.

“They’re called the cardiac Knights for a reason,” Kristi McCoy, UCF alumna and faculty member of executive communications in the office of the president at UCF, said.

Since Gus Malzahn was named head coach in 2021, UCF has seen on average 15 players commit and 5 players decommit per year. Over the last four years, UCF has also seen an average of 18 transfers each recruiting year.

However, this year's recruiting has stood out the most, as UCF football has seen below-average commitment rates since 2021, after Malzahn was named head coach. As of Nov. 21, the Knights had only 12 commitments.

The Knights have also seen the highest amount of decommits since 2021, with nine high school players so far decommitting before this season ended.

“Part of building a team now in college football is not just bringing in players, but retaining players that you’ve already recruited,” Kravitz said.

When asked what fans want to see from UCF football, Hendren said they want to see better investment and an effort to build back the team they saw in the past.

Memories of players like Mackenzie Milton, Shaquem Griffin, Dante Culpepper and Blake Bortles come to mind, who Hendren said helped build the reputation UCF football once had.

Fans like Kravitz and Hendren also feel this falls onto the coaching and athletics staff, taking responsibility for their players and their team.

“This is your job, if you're not creating a product that the players are a part of, that they feel like their careers can head in the right direction with, then it’s just not what they signed up for,” Kravitz said.

While UCF fans react to a disappointing 2024 season, many reflect on where UCF came from, as this is only the second season for the Knights in the Big 12 conference.

“This was decades of building up and building up, and now it seems to be more about NIL and how much money you can get to the students,” Jason Hendren, UCF alumnus and volunteer high school football coach, said.

While many players take advantage of NIL to better their chances of playing at higher levels or for financial reasons, fans like Valdes feel this can play a positive role in player recruitment, but can also negatively lead to players redshirting.

“I’m not saying NIL doesn’t work, but there should be some sort of regulation for the transfer portal,” Valdes said.

According to UCF fans, this could also mean having a higher investment in the team and recruitment from the coaching and athletics staff at the university, as donors and alumni feel the culture has been lost and has become more of a game of money.

“There’s no amount of money that I or any individual donor can give that will be enough because they don’t have enough money from their view,” Hendren said.

As a UCF alumnus and donor, Hendren said that this might be the right view for the Knights to move forward as a team and retain players in a competitive conference like the Big 12.

“As a donor, whenever you're interacting with anybody, it’s all just a matter of, ‘Can you do more?’” Hendren said. “There needs to be more money coming into the program to pay these players, or we’re not going to be competitive.”

Fans also find it to be a red flag when seeing a player redshirt early on in a season, like when wide receiver Xavier Townsend announced he would be redshirting right before the game against UF on Oct. 5.

“It’s a team sport, so you should also be committed to your team,” McCoy said in regards to players redshirting.

McCoy has been a fan since she attended UCF, and looks back at the memories she had going to Camping World Stadium for football games, and seeing fans wear shirts that said “Never lost a tailgate.”

This season, McCoy said that the Knights have sadly shown a regression back to those early days as a football team.

While fans reminisce on overflowing student sections, zombie nation blaring on the speakers at the Peach Bowl or beating up on USF on black Fridays, fans like McCoy feel what’s going to stick with them this season the most is the wave of emotions they feel for their beloved Knights.

“I love them,” McCoy said. “I’m always going to support them, but it’s sort of like when your child does something wrong; you're just disappointed.”