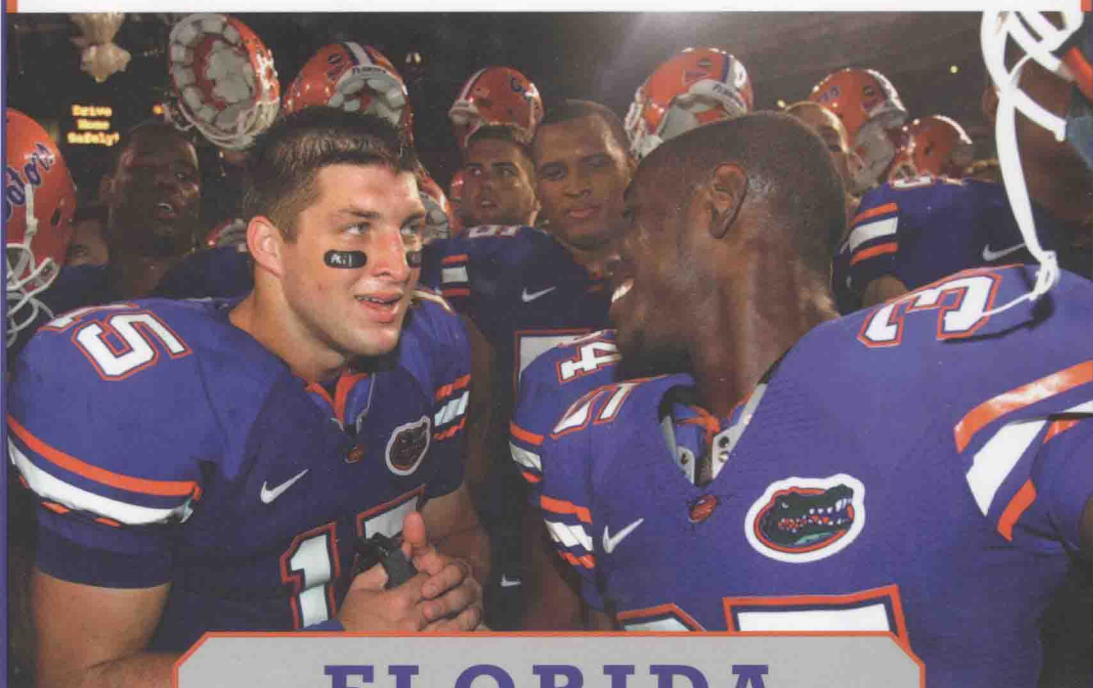


GAME OF MY LIFE



FLORIDA

GATORS

MEMORABLE STORIES OF GATORS FOOTBALL

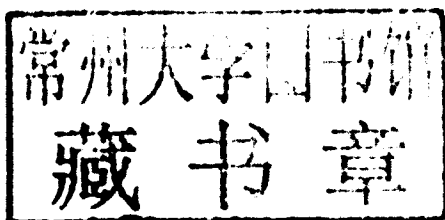
PAT DOOLEY
FOREWORD BY URBAN MEYER

GAME OF MY LIFE

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PAT DOOLEY

FOREWORD BY URBAN MEYER



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GAME OF MY LIFE

FLORIDA

GATORS

**FOR MY PARENTS, WHO IMMERSUED ME IN GATOR
FOOTBALL AT AN EARLY AGE, FOR MY WIFE, WHO
MAKES EVERY DAY SPECIAL, AND FOR MY DAUGHTERS,
WHO MAKE ME WHOLE.**

FOREWORD

When I became the head football coach at the University of Florida, I was well aware of the history of Gator football as it pertained to the incredible run during the 1990s. I watched Steve Spurrier's teams play and admired their abilities to compete and win games.

Once I arrived in Gainesville, it became clear that there was a deeper history to the school's football program. I am a big believer in celebrating the past and embracing the traditions and heroes of previous seasons.

Bringing those players back to speak to our team—Jack Youngblood, Carlos Alvarez, Emmitt Smith, Brad Culpepper, to name a few—helped our team win the 2006 national championship.

During my time at UF, it also has become obvious to me that *Gainesville Sun* sports columnist Pat Dooley has a grip on that history. Pat lived through much of it and has covered so many of the players who have made Florida football special.

In his book *Game of My Life Florida*, Pat takes Gator fans back into time and relives some of the special games in Florida football history, including a very special night for me and my family in Glendale, Arizona, with his chapter on Chris Leak.

The Gator Nation will enjoy looking back on these amazing accomplishments by so many of the people who helped make Florida the place to be in college football.

This book brings to life those games and those players who helped pave the way to many championships and happy times for the Gators.

Enjoy it with me and Go Gators!

There is also a chapter in *Game of My Life* about one of my favorite players—Ahmad Black. Ahmad made a huge play to help us win a second national title in 2008 and made the biggest play of my final game as Florida's coach in the Outback Bowl.

—Urban Meyer
Former Head Football Coach
Florida Gators Football

INTRODUCTION

When I was approached about writing a book detailing the “Game of My Life” for more than two dozen former Gator football players, I was giddy. Heck, I had seen almost all of the great performances in Florida history and knew many of the players involved.

And for a guy who considers deadline writing my best trait, having a year to write it made it seem like a snap.

But a few things happened along the way. In my job as columnist for *The Gainesville Sun*, I couldn’t have foreseen the magical runs by the football and basketball teams. Covering the three-peat made my time more difficult to manage.

But with a lot of help, I got it done.

Since I had personal relationships with many of the players I wanted to interview, getting them to sit down for interviews wasn’t difficult when I could find the time. Norm Carlson and Steve McClain with Florida’s sports information department filled in details and phone numbers.

Jim Trebilcock and Brian Kratzer at *The Sun* helped with the technological aspects of the book.

And my wife, Karen, was incredibly understanding when I told her I was locking myself in the office to write.

Putting this book together was an educational experience. One thing I discovered in talking to this Who’s Who of Gator players was how many of them made it to where they are because of two things:

1. Somewhere in their lives there was a mentor, whether it was a coach or a friend or a parent or even a peer group, who helped them with the foundation that allowed them to succeed.

2. They all had a tremendous inner fire that pushed them to be the best. One of my favorite stories involved Neal Anderson, who told his coaches at Florida that he was good enough to start and he’d better start or he was going home. He started against Kentucky and came up with “The Game of His Life.”

Memories are certainly faded and I had to provide some prodding with older players. Lindy Infante was the smart one, getting Carlson to send him the play-by-play of the 1960 Georgia Tech game to his Crescent Beach home so his memory would be refreshed when we sat down.

There were a couple of players I called who could not remember any game that stood out. They are not included in this book, but it doesn't mean they weren't great players.

One player whose memory was certainly fresh was Chris Leak. I saw Chris at a function before the 2006 season and told him I'd like to include him in the book after the season was over and his eligibility was up.

As I walked away from Chris, I wondered if there would be a compelling game that would interest the readers. If Florida went 8-4, what would that game be? At LSU in 2003? His first start? One of the Georgia games?

Little did I know that he would have one of the most memorable games of all as MVP of the BCS National Championship Game in Glendale, Arizona.

When I approached Florida coach Urban Meyer about writing the foreword for this book, he asked me if I had any of his players in it.

"Chris Leak," I said.

"What was his game?" Meyer asked.

"What do you think?" I said.

Meyer then asked me if it was Leak's best game. I told him that he had better games statistically, but never a better game.

Some of the choices by the players may surprise you. Shane Matthews, who quarterbacked Florida to its first SEC title, chose his first game as a starter. So did Wayne Peace. James Bates chose his senior season return to Knoxville. Carlos Alvarez chose his return home to Miami as a sophomore.

Others were more obvious—Kerwin Bell's miracle against Auburn, Chris Doering's catch at Kentucky, Danny Wuerffel's national title win in New Orleans, Wilber Marshall's harrassment of USC's backfield.

The thing that I took away from this book more than anything was that I thought I knew just about everything there was to know about Florida football. It turns out I only knew the stuff on the surface.

These pages should give you insight that will surprise you and delight you. I hope so, because as someone who has been going to Gator games since 1962, this was truly a labor of love.

More than anything, I want to thank the players who gave me their time. With every one of them, I told them it would take 20 minutes or so and we always ended up talking for at least an hour.

One funny story before I turn you over to *Game of My Life*. Cris Collinsworth is a very busy man who is difficult to contact. We exchanged e-mails for about six months. He'd set a day and then not be able to do it because of TV or family obligations.

As deadline approached, I was about to give up, especially when Florida's basketball run began in 2007 at the SEC Tournament in Atlanta. I was going to be the one who would be busy.

So as I settled into my press row seat to cover a game I had been looking forward to—Kentucky vs. Alabama in the first round—my cell phone rang.

“Pat, it's Cris Collinsworth.”

Now?

What are you going to do? I missed the game but got the interview and Collinsworth's chapter is one of the most entertaining in the book.

Thanks for reading.

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Chapter 1

CARLOS ALVAREZ

FLORIDA VS. MIAMI
NOVEMBER 29, 1969
ORANGE BOWL
MIAMI, FLORIDA

PREGAME

Alvarez was born in Havana, Cuba, where he lived until he was 10 years old, attending a private school run by Dominican Brothers.

“We were learning philosophy in first grade and they emphasized sports,” he said. “Baseball was the big thing. I had no idea what a football was until I got here.”

His father went to law school with Fidel Castro and knew him well enough to realize that when Castro took over it was time to leave Cuba.

“He had to convince my mom and that took him about a year,” Alvarez said. “It was great living there. We were watching a revolution take place. You know how kids collect baseball cards, we used to collect bullets. The guerillas, we used to ask them for bullets. It seems bizarre now.

“We left at about the time Castro was getting ready to shut the door. We made it by a month. We took the ferry to Key West. We had visited the U.S. so we knew a little about it. The ferry brought our car over, too, and we had it packed with everything we could stuff in it. My dad was a lawyer for a shipping company and he had a lot of friends in the business. My brothers had silverware stuffed in their pockets. The authorities in

Havana checked each car. When they came to our car they bypassed it because my dad had paid someone off.”

The family migrated to North Miami where nobody at the time spoke Spanish. At St. James Catholic School, two brothers and a sister were put into a difficult environment. The youngest Alvarez, Carlos wound up in the wrong classroom.

“I still remember the guy who sat in front of me—Paul Aaron,” he said. “I did everything he did. I would put Paul Aaron on the top of my papers because he did. Because it was North Miami, I don’t have an accent. Within a month I was speaking English. I have aunts who moved to South Miami who still don’t speak English.”

Because he played sports, it was easy to integrate himself into school. He attended North Miami High where Alvarez played running back and safety.

“I caught one pass my senior year,” he said. “I had the speed and I was the second-leading rusher in Dade County. I’d have been first but in the last game, this guy named Paul Casey, they wanted him to win the rushing title and he ran for 300 yards. We played our rivals and they shut me down.

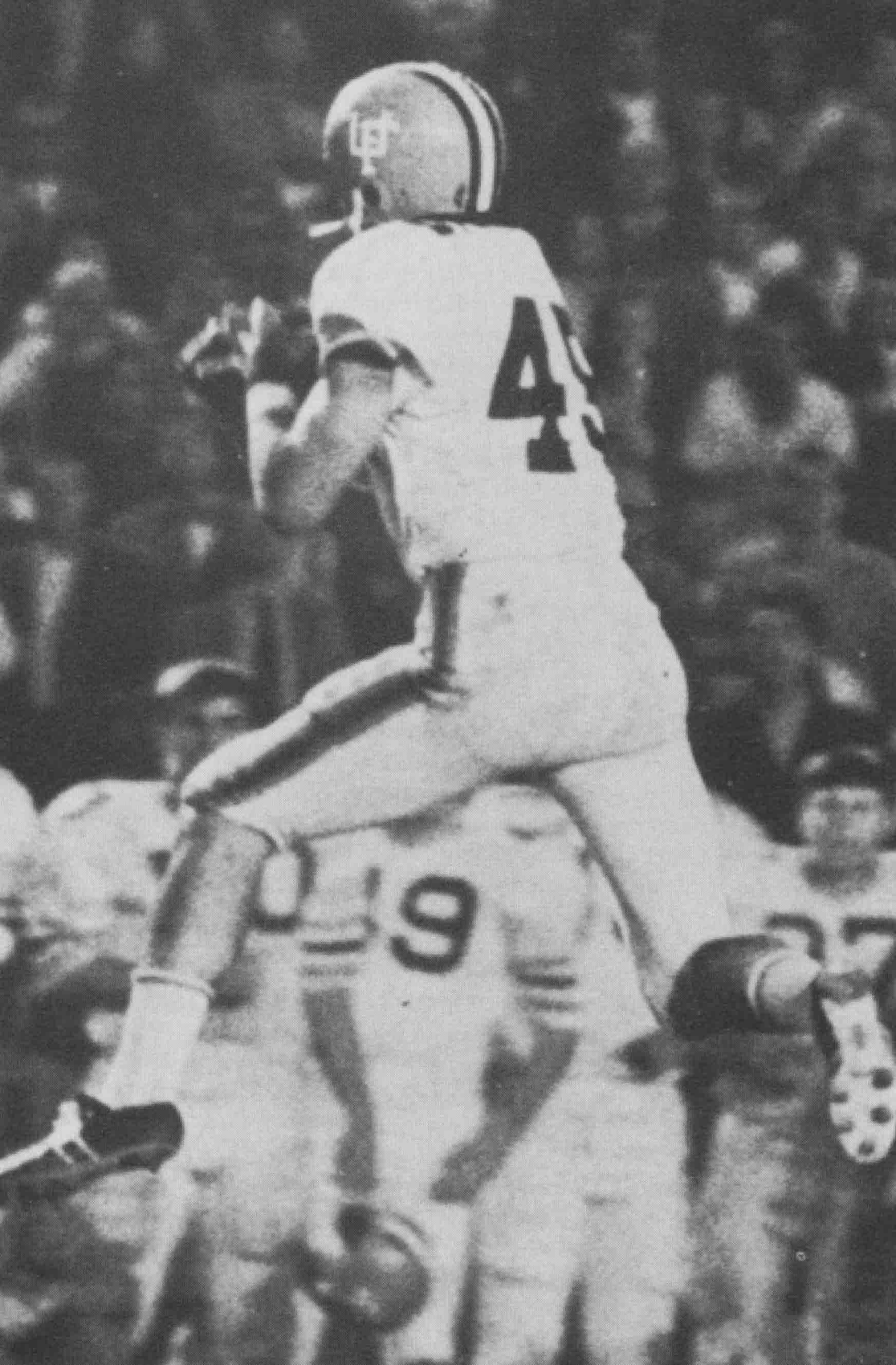
“The big thing for me was there was a Boys Club near our house, it was basketball, baseball, and football. All the kids who played basketball and baseball went out for football so I did, too.”

After his junior season, Alvarez “pretty much committed” to Vanderbilt. He couldn’t believe that they were offering a full ride. But during his senior year, other schools came calling.

One of them was Florida.

“Lindy Infante recruited me to Florida,” he said. “He was great. He made my mother feel like he was Hispanic. Once Florida offered, they flew the family up to Gainesville. It was perfect match for me. Both of my brothers were at Florida.”

Alvarez was also recruited by Miami where he had attended several games. He was a big fan of Miami quarterback George Mira, whose scrambling abilities caught Alvarez’s eye.



But when the Hurricanes were recruiting Alvarez, he found himself in coach Charley Tate's office staring at a stuffed alligator hanging from the wall.

"It was offensive to me," Alvarez said. "That's when I knew I was going to be a Gator."

Florida recruited Alvarez as a running back or a defensive back, not as a wide receiver. But at 175 pounds, he wondered if running back was the right position, especially once practice started and he saw 200-pound All-America running back Larry Smith in action.

"I thought, 'If that's the style of Florida football, I'll be dead by the end of the first year,'" he said.

Florida allowed Alvarez to try out at wide receiver. He was ready because of a strenuous workout schedule during the off-season. It was part work ethic, part fear of not making the team that drove him that summer.

"If I don't make it, I don't ever want to look back and say I should have done this or that," he said.

During the high school all-star game at Florida Field, Alvarez caught a few passes out of the backfield from John Reaves. It was a hook-up that would become Florida legend.

One of his first pass routes in practice at UF came against All-America defensive back Steve Tannen. Alvarez ran a post pattern, caught a perfect spiral from Reaves and slowed down.

"One-on-one when you have the whole field and no safety rolling over, it's not too hard," he said. "I beat Tannen clean, John threw a perfect pass, but Tannen came behind me when I stopped and just killed me.

"All of my Cuban temper came up. I jumped on him and started fighting him. The coaches were all over me, telling me you're not supposed to do that with the varsity.

"Lindy came over and said, 'Don't do that . . . but he deserved it.' After that first day, I was never going to move back."

Freshmen weren't eligible then, so Alvarez had to wait his turn. He didn't have to wait long. After lighting up the upperclassmen in pre-season practices, Reaves and Alvarez hooked up on a 70-yard touchdown pass on their first connection against Houston.

Alvarez kept it going, even making *Sports Illustrated* with his fingertip catch in a 21-6 win over Florida State. The Super Soph backfield

rolled through the first six games of the season before suffering a loss at Auburn and a tie against Georgia.

Florida finished off its SEC schedule with a win over Kentucky, then had the week off before the regular-season finale against Miami.

Alvarez, for one, couldn't wait. He was going home a hero with a chance to play in front of so many people he knew.

Plus, there was a score to settle for that stuffed alligator hanging in the coach's office.

THE GAME OF MY LIFE

BY CARLOS ALVAREZ

The Miami game, from an individual standpoint, had so much going on emotionally for me. We had such a great season and to be able to go back with our team doing so well and me having a great season was special.

There are three or four games where everything is rolling right and the energy and things are flowing in the right direction and this was definitely one of them for me.

The game was in Miami on Thanksgiving weekend and it was the game I was pointing to all year. My family was pointing to it, so many friends in Miami were pointing to it. During the week I got a lot of calls from Miami people. The whole thing was channeled towards a special night.

When we got there my family was there at the hotel. I had to fly out the next day for the coaches' All-America team television appearance in New York.

I always got really tense until I got on the field. I hated night games because you have to sit there all day. You just hate it.

I had all kinds of butterflies. You have to calm yourself because you don't want to waste any energy. I meditated. Now, the kids have mp3 players, which is great. You have to keep your mind off of it or you burn out before the game.

We had a great senior class. People talk about senior leadership, well, when I think back to my sophomore year, it made things easier for the sophomores who were there. They would fire us up at the right time. Our locker room was always calm, but this was an emotional setting.

The Orange Bowl was packed and there were so many Cubans there because I was first the Cuban athlete to really play football and get some recognition. We had a lot of Gator fans and a lot of Cuban fans in the stands. Miami would usually draw 20,000, but it was packed.

Before the game, four or five of my high school friends who used to sneak into the Orange Bowl told me before the game, "Not only are we going to sneak in but we'll meet you at the 50." And there they were, not that I could do a whole lot with them, but it just cracked me up they made it that far.

You don't sneak up on anybody after that first game we had. We did sneak up on Houston, but after that a lot of times I got double-teamed, so we had to have balance.

We didn't put anything new in for this game. Our strategy was to see how the defensive backs were covering. We did the hitch just to let them know we could go long. You have to do that. It doesn't matter if you complete it or not; just get it into the defensive back's head. It opens up middle routes.

The first pass I caught was a long pattern. I figured Miami wanted to take me out of the game with double teams. On the first pass, I remember going up and catching the ball and falling even though nobody was touching me because I wanted to make sure I caught the ball.

Once I got the first one, it was all over in my mind. I knew. Even when I was warming up, I was catching everything John threw. I remember doing a 25-yard out pattern reaching out with one hand and pulling it in. It just stuck. And I was feeling the energy. My legs were fresh because we had an open date.

They single-covered me for much of the game until it started to pile up and then they doubled me. Andy Cheney was playing opposite me but he got hurt. He actually had more catches than me when he went out. John was just on.

To catch 15 passes in one game, you have to have a lot working for you. To run that many routes, you have to be fresh. It was a night game, so it wasn't hot. The other receivers have to be playing well to keep the defense from keying on you. And you have to have a close game or you're out. It was close enough although we had them the whole way. The final was 35-16.

That last catch of the game, Miami was double teaming me. Fred Pancoast, who was our offensive coordinator, put me in the slot just to get