

GRIDIRON GREATS

July 18, 2022

Presented by the
Thunderbird
Football
Alumni

Mark Nykolaichuk
celebrating his 4th
quarter Western
Bowl-clinching
pick-6 ('87)

**MARK
NYKOLAICHUK
AND
BILLY GREENE**



OUR SPONSORS



VANCOUVER

UMBRELLA

established 1932



INDOCHINO

MADE FOR YOU

VELA WEALTH



ST. MARK'S COLLEGE
CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE

MARK NYKOLAICHUK

#34, DB/LB

1985–1988

BPhEd, Class of 1991. Major: Sport, Leisure, and Event Administration; Minor: Urban Geography.

Mark owns Renmar Management Services LTD, a design consultancy firm in the pharmaceutical space. He's also spent time working in facility management.

In 2016, Mark won the Sport BC President's Award (Football).

Mark and his wife Renata, an elementary school teacher, live in North Burnaby.



Mark receiving the Sport BC President's Award alongside his wife, Renata.

T-Bird Legacy

- 3-year varsity letterman
 - Defensive co-captain ('88)
 - Western Bowl champion ('87)
 - Led CW in interceptions—6 ('85), most INTs in a game-3 vs. CAL ('85), and longest INT return touchdown-85 vs. ALB ('85)
 - Led UBC in fumble returns and tied for the lead in INT's ('85)
 - Tied for the UBC lead with the longest INT return yards in a game-62 vs. SSK ('87), and INT's in a game-2 vs. CAL ('88)
 - CFL draft 8th Rd, 63rd overall ('89)
 - Selected Defensive MVP of the Shrum Bowl ('88)
 - Named to the UBC Top-100 player rankings ('16)
 - Named to UBC's 1980's All-Decade team ('20)
- Career Stats: 11 interceptions, 171 interception return yards, 2 TDs.

1. What was your reaction to being named to the 1980's All-Decade team?

I had only played 3 years, so to be recognized alongside some of the all-time greats was a surprise. I wasn't expecting it. Nor was I expecting to be named to the Top 100 Players list. My path while at UBC was somewhat unconventional. After having a solid start in 1985, I was asked to leave the school due to poor marks, failing out miserably (a list nobody wants to be on). I missed the Vanier Cup

win in 1986, then returned in 1987. Fortunately, we had a solid year, going 8-0 and winning a birth in the Vanier Cup. Sadly, we lost to McGill. I played one more year in 1988. In the end, as much as I had missed out on a Vanier Cup Championship Team, I felt very fortunate the team (coaches and players) challenged me to return. And thus, being named to any list (except for the aforementioned) is truly humbling and unexpected. And no I don't have any regrets. Lessons learned many, but no regrets.

2, Why UBC, what was the recruiting pitch by Coach Frank Smith?

In 1985, I moved to Vancouver from Toronto as my dad was transferred out here for work. Although I had some interest from Ontario Universities, I thought it might be interesting to come out west as many of my high schoolmates had come out this way to play at SFU. As well, I had seen UBC play in the 1982 Vanier Cup at Toronto Varsity Stadium and so I knew the team / program was competitive. So, upon moving out west, I connected with



a few of the guys I knew playing at SFU. I met with Coach Beaton, thought there might be some interest, didn't really feel it. I then met with Coach Smith. Coach Smith took enough of an interest that he extended an invitation to try-out. All I remember is during our meeting he asked me how fast I run the 40. I answered 4.7. He said everyone runs the 40 in 4.7. I thought I was busted, as I had no idea how fast I ran the 40. I just knew from reading a variety of training material that was a respectable time. As I was more of a hockey player than a football player I had some work in front of me before I hit 2-a-days! I am very thankful to Coach Smith for giving me the opportunity. Years later you look back and realize how lucky you were to play with those teams and be led by those coaches.

3. Do you remember the first start of your career in university football?

I think it was vs. Saskatchewan (?) and I was playing HB. I was scared. The game was much faster than high school. The players were bigger. I was thinking, 'What I am doing here?' I never had played this position. I must give credit to Dave Easley (DB Coach). The first time we hit the field in 2-a-days, he said "You backpedal like you're skating. We're not playing hockey here." Within a short time, he had coached the skating out of me enough to start the very first game. Thanks Coach! As well, the DBs of the day were great, always helping and encouraging.

4. Tell us about coach Bob Laycoe and his impact on the UBC football program?

Every now and then you intersect with a rare breed of person who truly impacts your life as well as many others (at that specific moment and further on). Someone who cares, influences creativity, and allows you to be you. A person who gets the best out of you while giving his best. Coach Laycoe was that person. When you look at the number of great defensive players that UBC had during his tenure, you realize how fortunate you were to have been coached by him. Coach Laycoe always seemed calm in the midst of it all. For each game, he would have a comprehensive plan that created a level of proficiency (and competency) for each player and the unit to excel. We were so well prepared for each game. How could you not be competitive?

5. How important is it that former players support the current team and their experience at UBC?

UBC has such a rich history. Every player has shared in making that history. I'm sure we can all reflect on instances that changed the way we think, our attitudes, and helped shape us a young adult. I think it's important for the alumni to know that they can make an impact today (just as they did when they played) by getting involved. Whether it's volunteering for a committee, attending a game, or through a donation – your involvement is important to the future of the program. It's never too late to (re)connect. Every alumnus has a reason to be proud of being a T-Bird for life. I've often thought we joined the best fraternity on campus!

6. You played with All-Stars and All-Canadians on both sides of the ball. Who did you look forward to covering during the one-on-one periods?

Every single one of our receivers. They had speed, agility, technical skills, and a want to beat us every single time. Craig Keller could blow right by you as if he was Willie Gault. Mike Bellefontaine was the “Fred Biletnikoff” of our team. One second you think you have him, the next he’s gone. Tom Vlasic was sure-handed and consistent. Todd Wickman and Andrew Porth could turn you inside out. Whether it was a running back, slot back, or wideout – they were going to give 110%. Every one of our receivers were great! We looked at one-on-ones like they were a real game. We didn't want to get beat. What better way to prepare for a game? And all the better if you could intercept one, especially against an All-Canadian or Western All-Star!

7. Can you tell us about the playoff run to the Vanier Cup in 1987?

The team was coming off a tremendous year and Vanier Cup win in '86 with many players returning, so there was a lot of momentum heading into the season. 1987 was a great year—we beat SFU in the Shrum Bowl, went 8-0 in CIS division play, and made it to the Vanier Cup. The Western Bowl (played at T-Bird Stadium) was a great game. The weather was perfect, and the opponents, Wilfred Laurier,



came ready to play! It couldn't have been a harder-fought game on both sides of the ball. It was a real see-saw battle until the very end of the game. I remember Roger Hennig was playing HB and had just leveled Luke Garretson, their fullback.

L to R: Larry Reda, Jay Prepchuk, George Oswald, and Mark.

Whether you were on offense or defense, players were making great catches and big hits all over the field. It went down to the very late stages of the game. Fortunately, we prevailed in the end. It was a great ride!

8. How did you and your teammates celebrate the 1989 CFL draft?

My mom and dad had returned to live in Toronto in 1987, so I was on my own out west here. I believe Craig Keller and I had cake at his mom's house. Craig was drafted by Toronto, and I was drafted by BC. I believe we ended up at the Pit Pub afterwards. Can't tell you much past that! But I believe we had a good time!

9. You often returned watch games, how do you think your 1980's secondary would match up against Michael O'Connor, Billy Greene and Blake Smelser?

Three great quarterbacks who succeeded at the University level (and beyond). I think we would be very competitive. When you have the likes of Mark Norman, Jordan Leith, Bruce McDonald, Terry Ainge, Bill Barber, Roger Hennig, Dean Heffring, and Rob Moretto – you have the start of a solid secondary. Wouldn't you agree?

10. Can you describe the game and your 4 QB sacks vs. SFU ('88)?

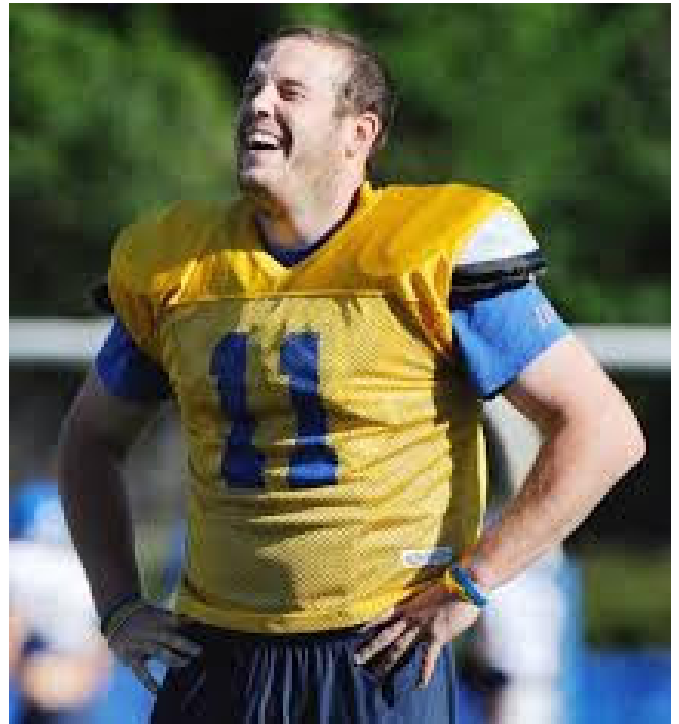
It was a great game. We played US rules on our field. I had an issue with my neck during the week of practice leading up to the game, a bone spur in my neck that was causing my arm to go numb when hit a certain way. The team doctor recommended that I not play. The coaching staff were told the same. Ultimately, I had come to the conclusion that I wanted to play no matter the outcome. Life works in mysterious ways. Coach (Casey) Smith was running the defense. He had me playing OLB as one of the incumbents was injured during camp. Given we were playing US rules, we were on the line of scrimmage, so we could get to the quarterback quicker. It was a hard-fought game. SFU was not going to roll over by no means. The defensive scheme Coach Smith prepared for this game had some flexibility to it. He was okay with a little improvising as he knew we were prepared and wouldn't get caught. Thus, we pretty much shut down the SFU QB, as we were in the backfield a good portion of the game. I was fortunate to have played with Casey Smith my first year in 1985. To be coached by him my last year was special! He was a class act!

BILLY GREENE

**#11, QB
2009–2012**

BA, English, Class of 2012.
Billy is now an air traffic controller with Nav Canada. He and his girlfriend Leann live in Vancouver.

T-Bird Legacy



- Hardy Cup Finalist ('11)
 - Led UBC in total offensive plays, passing ('09, '10, '11, '12)
 - Led UBC in rushing yards - 668 ('10)
 - Led CW in passing yards - 2,558 ('11)
 - CW Frank Gnup Conference MOP
 - CIS Hec Crighton MOP ('11)
 - Bus Phillips Memorial Award ('12)
 - Bobby Gaul Memorial Trophy ('13)
 - CW All-Star ('11)
 - CIS All-Canadian ('11), invited to the CFL National Combine ('12)
- Named to the UBC's Top-100 careers ('16)**
- Named to the UBC's 2000's All-Decade team ('20)
- Set school 16-records, including most pass attempts in a game (55 vs. Simon Fraser, Oct. 8th, 2010), and the longest pass completion in a game (98 yards vs. Manitoba, Oct. 20th 2012).**
- Career Stats: 52 career touchdown passes, 9,088 passing yards.**

1. What do you recall about the game vs. SFU ('10) and your 55-passing attempts?

That SFU game definitely sticks out as a complete battle from the very beginning of the game. I remember us getting down early and then having to claw back all game. I don't know the exact breakdown, but I bet 35 of those attempts were in the 2nd half and we didn't really get anything going points-wise until the 3rd quarter. I remember us having a chance to win it from the 15-yard line and I just missed a little high on a pass to David Scott in the end zone.

2. Your head coach was former Vanier Cup Champion and CW MOP Shawn Olson, how much impact did he have on your career?

I tell people whenever they ask about my personal success at UBC, that Coach Olson gets about 99.9% of the credit. He pushed me in ways that nobody ever had and really helped develop me as a passer. I always had a strong arm and could do certain things but he molded me into an all-around passer who had confidence to make all the throws. The hours that he put in with me were something that really flipped a switch for me when he got to UBC. My 3rd year we had some success and then the offseason between the 2010 and 2011 seasons we worked our tails off to make sure we could have the success that our offence believed we could have. I was fortunate that the hard work of the entire group reflected well on me. Shawn was one of those coaches who had that ability to be someone you were comfortable being around but also demanded the utmost respect of his players.

3. Why did you choose to attend UBC and play for the 'Birds?

I chose UBC for a couple of reasons. The ability to stay at home and receive an education from a University with such high standing as UBC both factored greatly into my decision. Football-wise, the team has a deep history of developing players and being able to



compete within the conference. It was a little bit of a downtime for the program when I got there, but we had a strong group of players commit before me and I believed that there was potential for a core group to help bring the program back to strength.



4. Can you tell us about the 'Birds you played with in the Hardy Cup?

That 2011 group was a lot of fun, I mentioned before the work that was put in during the offseason leading up to the season. I also remember that was the first year we really started to have guys who were from out of town, stay in Vancouver for the summer to work and train. I think this helped bring the team closer together because we had about 40 guys who were all on the field together doing player-led throw-arounds as well as in the gym pushing each other all summer. Once the season hit, I think we knew we had some potential but just weren't quite sure how it would play out. I had an absolutely stacked WR core with Jordan Grieve, Spencer Betts, David Scott, Micha Thiel, Mitch Shuster as well as TE/HB combo of Ryan Couper and Joey Gabrick. This with a very strong OL helped us really take a step forward that year. Unfortunately it didn't end the way we wanted, but I think that year really helped show what UBC could do and helped with recruiting for the coaching staff.

5. When the pre-season schedule was released, was there one CW opponent that you were looking forward to play?

I always had U of S circled on my calendar each year when the schedule came out. My entire family is from Regina or Saskatoon, and I strongly considered going to U of S out of high school. My first career start was in Saskatoon in 2008 and I remember some fans being less than impressed that I didn't choose to go there. It's such a great environment to play in there, even though sometimes it's -30 and I couldn't feel the ball in my hand, ha-ha.

6. When you were named All-Canadian and Hec Crighton winner as MVP, what was that CIS awards week like?

CIS awards week was amazing! I was so fortunate to have it be in Vancouver where I could be with my family and have them at everything. I had my teammates here with me and we had a big alumni event for the Vanier. I think it's such a great thing that the CIS/USports do to bring the top players in the country together and really promote what they have done for that season. It was for sure a week that I will never forget.

7. You set 16 school records. Is there one that stands out above the others and why?

I think the one that sticks out most to me was the total passing yards in a career. It really points out the longevity that players before me had, and then that I was fortunate enough to have as well. The list of players that are on that list from before I played were all players that I admired and wanted to be like when I got to UBC. I had set goals that I wanted to be viewed with those greats when I started at UBC and getting into that group by the time I graduated was the culmination of a lot of hard work.

8. Can you tell us about your experience at the CFL combine?

My experience at the CFL combine was interesting...I went knowing that I wasn't going to get much of a look as a QB, but still wanted to go and try to showcase what I could do as a passer. It was unfortunate that I wasn't at 100% health when I went so I didn't test as well as I wanted to, but I have no regrets about going and seeing how I stacked up against some of the other top QBs from across the country. I was fortunate to get some workouts later on once I was

shealthier again, but I chose to go play 2 seasons in Europe as a QB instead of attempting to switch positions.

9. Is there any room left in your trophy case? Hec Crighton, Bus Phillips, Bobby Gaul, what is your legacy at UBC?

I think my legacy at UBC is one that stacks up with some all-time greats, which is still kind of surreal to me. UBC has such a strong tradition and when people mention me with names

like Danny Smith, Jordan Gagner, Shawn Olson and Mike O'Connor, it is just such an honour. Looking back at receiving those awards is a time in my life I will never forget! One major thing that I hope my legacy left was that I always wanted to be the best teammate and leader that I could be. Each year when the team voted for Captains I hoped that I was leading the right way in the offseason to get the support and respect of my teammates. I think being a Captain for 4 seasons is one of the things that I am most proud of from my time at UBC.



10. How did you react to being named to the Thunderbirds Top-100 careers in 2016?

I reacted with pure joy and astonishment, ha-ha. When the list started, I truly didn't know where I would land on it. I thought I had done enough to be on it, but we didn't have as much team success while I was there and I would have hoped, so I was kind of unsure. As the list went on and we got near the top, it kind of just became a feeling of disbelief. I was a big believer in diving into the history of the program while I was a player, so I would know as many people as possible and understand their impact on the program. To finish on a list like that, where I did was truly an honour and something that I will hold close to me forever.



TFA LEGACY GOLF CLASSIC

Thursday July 21, 2022 | 1pm Golf & Dinner to follow

Tsawwassen Springs Golf Course

5133 Springs Blvd, Tsawwassen, BC

[REGISTER TODAY](#)



TFA LEGACY GOLF CLASSIC

MAJOR SPONSORS



DAVID NEGRIN

DAVE KIRZINGER

HOLE SPONSORS

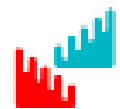


**DEREK
TOWNSEND**

OSLER

Osler, Hoskin
& Harcourt LLP

**PATRICK
SULLIVAN**



WAREHOOS

**ROSS
POWER**



**BRAYDON
HOBBS**



**BRADEN SMITH
SHAWN McISSAC
CHRIS DAVIES**