

# The Big East's best: Matt Grothe, No. 3

By BRIAN BENNETT

*ESPN.com*

05-21-09

Ranking the Big East's top 30 players ...

Matt Grothe

No. 3

Matt Grothe, QB, South Florida

Why him here: Now this should prompt an interesting debate.

I probably could have ranked Grothe No. 1, considering that he's probably the most recognizable star in the Big East right now and means so much to his team. There are some, including many commenters on this list recently, who don't think Grothe even belongs in the top five because of his penchant for turnovers and his questionable NFL potential. Both sides have a point.

In the end, though, you can't ignore past production. Grothe has started every game for the Bulls since the 2006 season opener and has amassed 10,282 yards of total offense. He needs just 287 yards to eclipse Pat White (again) as the Big East's all-time leader in that category. By the time the season is over, he could own several Big East career passing records.

Yes, Grothe has thrown 14 interceptions in each of his first three seasons (remarkably consistent, in a bad sort of way). But he's also led South Florida to bowl games all three years, and there's no doubt that this is the best three-year span in the short history of the program. And he could be primed for his best year yet under new offensive coordinator Mike Canales.

Keep in mind, too, that he's done all this with very little help from his offensive mates. Grothe is normally Option 1, Option 2 and Option 3 for the Bulls and has led them in rushing three straight years. Few players in the country have the ability to escape pressure and still make throws downfield. Just check out this legendary highlight from 2006. Or this one from last year.

Can Grothe make it in the NFL as a quarterback? At 6 feet, 205 pounds, he'll have a steep hill to climb. But his athleticism, experience and toughness will at least give him a shot at earning a roster spot somewhere.

That's down the road. Right now, Grothe is one of the very best players in the Big East.

The countdown

No. 4: Noel Devine, RB, West Virginia  
No. 5: Mardy Gilyard, WR, Cincinnati  
No. 6: Jonathan Baldwin, WR, Pittsburgh  
No. 7: Victor Anderson, RB, Louisville  
No. 8: Greg Romeus, DE, Pittsburgh  
No. 9: Arthur Jones, DT, Syracuse  
No. 10: Reed Williams, LB, West Virginia  
No. 11: Ryan D'Imperio, LB, Rutgers

No. 12: Anthony Davis, OT, Rutgers  
No. 13: Scott Lutrus, LB, Connecticut  
No. 14: Jarrett Brown, QB, West Virginia  
No. 15: Aaron Berry, CB, Pittsburgh  
No. 16: Robert Vaughn, S, Connecticut  
No. 17: Scooter Berry, DL, West Virginia  
No. 18: Jabaal Sheard, DE, Pittsburgh  
No. 19: Scott Long, WR, Louisville  
No. 20: Jason Pinkston, OT, Pittsburgh  
No. 21: Jessie Hester Jr., WR, South Florida  
No. 22: Ryan Blaszczyk, C, Rutgers  
No. 23: Jeff Linkenbach, OT, Cincinnati  
No. 24: Brandon Hogan, CB, West Virginia  
No. 25: Mike Williams, WR, Syracuse  
No. 26: Nate Allen, S, South Florida  
No. 27: Jock Sanders, WR, West Virginia  
No. 28: Nate Byham, TE, Pitt  
No. 29: Jon Dempsey, LB, Louisville  
No. 30: Moe Petrus, OL, UConn

# Grothe Gears Up for Final Year

By: Tom Zebold  
*Lakeland Ledger*  
04-10-09

South Florida quarterback Matt Grothe is trimmed up and focused on leading the Bulls to big things in 2009.

The former Lake Gibson standout has dropped his weight to about 200 pounds this spring in preparation to do more damage for USF this fall. Last year, the 6-footer teetered around 205 to 208 at the beginning of last season.

"I'd like to play at where I'm at right now," Grothe said. "I feel like I'm in the best shape I've ever been here. I feel like my arm is the strongest it's been since I've been here. Hopefully, I can keep it going to the fall and we can do some big things this year."

The former two-time Ledger Player of the year plans to play a little bit in the first half today's spring game, which starts at 7 p.m. at Raymond James Stadium. But he won't be live against the Bulls' defense.

When Grothe's on the field, he'll be working with a new offensive coordinator. Former USF wide receivers coach Mike Canales took over after the departure of Greg Gregory.

"Coach Canales has been around here. He knows the offense in and out just like anybody else here," Grothe said.

Canales has spent six seasons at USF in two stints and was the Bulls' offensive coordinator from 1996 to 2000.

"He's doing a really good job of pushing me toward my strengths and keeping me away from my weaknesses and putting me in a good position on the field," Grothe said.

And while the Bulls' offensive scheme isn't set in stone yet, Grothe said it might be more of a wide-open format.

"We're going to try and keep it always spread out," Grothe said. "There were times the last couple of years where we'd look like a spread team, and then at times we wouldn't look like a spread team. I think we're just trying to stick with one system and go with it."

Getting out of the pocket could lead to more success for the dual-threat quarterback, who has passed for 8,157 yards and rushed for 2,085 in three seasons.

While Grothe will likely participate in today's game, a couple of other big names won't. All-American defensive end George Selvie won't suit up to avoid risking injury. Running back Jamar Taylor will be out after having surgery to fix his shoulder, which has bothered him since playing at Lakeland High School.

Before Grothe leaves USF, he wants to help the Bulls achieve something they've haven't.

"I think the biggest thing I want to accomplish this year is to put ourselves in a position that, going into

the last Big East game of the year, to either know that we have the Big East won or playing for the Big East when we go up to Connecticut."

After that, Grothe said he'd like to continue playing.

"Right now I'm focused on this year and going into it. But I mean, after the year is over, it's always up for debate," he said. "You never know. It would be awesome to."

# Grothe Decides To Return To USF For Senior Season

By BRETT MCMURPHY  
*Tampa Tribune*

12-2-08

TAMPA - University of South Florida junior quarterback Matt Grothe has reconsidered and will not petition the NFL's draft advisory council and said he definitely is returning for his senior season.

Two weeks ago, Grothe told The Tampa Tribune he would check with the advisory council to see what his projected draft status would be if he left early. He also said if projected to be selected in the first four rounds, he "probably would go" to the NFL and not return for his senior season.

Today, though, Grothe said he will not contact the advisory council and will return for his senior season. The Bulls close the regular season Saturday at West Virginia.

"I'm coming back next year," Grothe said. "I guess I'll just come back and play well next year and hopefully go out with a bang my senior year."

When he does, Grothe likely will be playing behind former Florida State and Jefferson OT Daron Rose, who said he will attend USF next year.

Mike Detillier, an NFL draft expert with M & D Draft Report and SaintsReport.com, said Grothe would benefit from another year in college. Detillier projected Grothe as a sixth- or seventh-round pick if he came out this year in a heavily junior-laden draft.

"He's a good college player, tough kid, mobile and he has improved his overall accuracy skills," Detillier said. "But he is not real tall and has a tendency to blow hot and cold with his accuracy.

"I see a lot of rough edges in his passing game and techniques. He needs to come back his senior season and refine his overall skills as a passer."

NFLDraftScout.com rates Grothe as the nation's 18th-best NFL quarterback prospect.

Blocking for Grothe will be the 6-5, 284-pound Rose, a former prep All-American who signed with FSU in 2006. Rose played two seasons at FSU, starting 11 games as a sophomore in 2007. However, in May 2008, he was ruled academically ineligible. He is attending Hillsborough Community College this year and will have two years of eligibility (2009-10) at USF.

"This was the best fit for me," Rose said. "Just sitting down and thinking about it and praying about it, going back to Florida State wouldn't have been the best option for me."

As a senior at Jefferson in 2005, Rose was rated among the nation's top recruits under Mike Simmonds, now USF's offensive line coach.

While Grothe definitely will return, USF officially announced it would submit the paperwork with the NFL Draft advisory committee for junior defensive end George Selvie, who is projected as a first-round

pick.

Selvie, who purchased an insurance policy before the season in case he suffered a career-ending injury, has said he won't make a decision whether he will return for his senior season until after USF's bowl game.

# USF's Grothe Checking On NFL Draft Possibilities

By BRETT MCMURPHY

*Tampa Tribune*

11-19-08

TAMPA - University of South Florida quarterback Matt Grothe isn't sure what to expect, but he wants to check just in case.

That's why the junior said he will petition the National Football League's draft advisory council after this season to see where he might get drafted.

If Grothe is projected to be selected in the first four rounds, he said he "probably would go" to the NFL and not return for his senior season.

"I might as well [check]; it can't hurt anything," Grothe said. "If I was drafted by the third or fourth round, I would go."

Grothe, who has started 35 of 36 games for the Bulls, said he will graduate in either May or this summer.

Grothe leads the Big East in passing (236.2 yards per game), touchdown passes (15) and total offense (275.5 yards). For the third consecutive season, the 6-foot, 205-pound Grothe also is USF's leading rusher. He already ranks second on USF's all-time list in TD passes (44), TD runs (22), yards passing (7,608) and total offense (9,495) and third in yards rushing (1,887).

While he's not sure how much of a demand there is in the NFL for a 6-foot quarterback, Grothe said playing in the NFL would fulfill a lifelong dream. Grothe is rated as the nation's 18th best NFL quarterback prospect by NFLDraftScout.com.

"If they moved me to nose guard, I'd play," he said.

In Saturday's loss to Rutgers, Grothe suffered a severely sprained ankle and has been wearing a protective boot since. He did not practice Tuesday and is unsure when he will return to practice. However, he said he would play in Sunday's home finale against Connecticut, even if he had to "play on one leg."

The Bulls already are losing 22 seniors, including 14 starters, from this year's team. Losing Grothe would be another big loss since junior defensive end George Selvie, projected as a first-round draft pick, may leave early for the NFL and not to return for his senior season.

Selvie, who will graduate in May, said he won't make a decision until after the Bulls' season ends, but it's likely Selvie will leave early for the NFL.

# Grothe Off To Great Start

*Tampa Tribune*

10-16-08

TAMPA - University of South Florida junior QB Matt Grothe, off to the best start of his career, looks to continue his masterful play when the Bulls play at Louisville on Saturday.

Through seven games, Grothe has completed 65.4 percent of his passes (125 of 191) for 1,552 yards and 12 TDs. Even more impressive is he has thrown just three interceptions after having thrown 28 in his first two seasons.

And despite not taking as many risks with the ball, Grothe's gunslinger mentality still remains.

"Matt's Matt. You saw it in the first year and all the way through now," WR Marcus Edwards said. "He's a playmaker; he makes plays. He scrambles around and he puts the ball where it needs to be. There's not really much you can say about it. His play speaks for itself."

Edwards is among a talented group of selfless receivers that make life easier for Grothe.

"When you have a number of receivers you can spread the ball out and defenses have a lot more difficult time keying on one person," Edwards said. "A lot of teams have that one big-play guy, we have several.

"Every receiver wants the ball. You can't say guys don't say, 'I want the ball.' But as a receiver you also have to look at team goals and you have to put the team ahead of yourself sometimes."

# Breaking news: The Grohawk is back

*Tampabay.com*

10-16-08

As Bulls quarterback Matt Grothe took off his helmet during Thursday's practice, he showed off a reminder of one of the fun memories of USF's 6-0 start last season: The Grohawk.

Yes, the sides of his head are again shaved clean, as they were a year ago. Was it a nod to last year's rise to No. 2 in the rankings? An uncontrollable outburst of Rays mania? As it turns out, it was something of an accident.

Grothe, you see, went to Miracles in Motion, a barber shop on Fletcher Avenue we wrote about last season for the ornate designs shaved into the sides of the heads of Bulls basketball stars like guard Chris Howard. The same barber -- his name is Elvis -- has done artful designs for football players such as Dontavia Bogan. Anyway, Grothe, humble guy that he is, went to Elvis looking to get a "Superman"-style "S" on the side of his head.

Unfortunately, the barber was looking in the mirror as he started to make the S and thus had the letter going backwards (that's Zuperman, by our count). So Grothe opted to just go with a clean slate, so to speak. Will it help the Bulls on Saturday? Win or lose, it'll be all the buzz in pregame warmups.

-- USF coach Jim Leavitt isn't talking injuries, and defensive coordinator Wally Burnham said Thursday that he won't know if linebacker Brouce Mompremier has been cleared to play Saturday until he's evaluated by USF trainers. I can tell you that defensive end George Selvie and defensive tackle Terrell McClain, who have practiced all week as they recover from ankle injuries, both lined up with the first-team defensive line as they went through reads and alignments at Thursday's practice.

# Pitt Football: Panthers prep for S. Florida's strong arm

By PAUL ZEISE

*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

09-29-08

Pitt survived its scare Saturday at Syracuse.

And while the 34-24 victory wasn't a thing of beauty, that survival means Thursday night the Panthers will be involved in something they really haven't been a part of since 2005's season opener against Notre Dame:

A big game that is meaningful to both the Panthers and their opponent -- South Florida -- and one that will be watched with at least some interest nationally.

That's because the No. 10 Bulls are 5-0 and are considered the best team in the Big East. If the Panthers (3-1, 1-0) could pull an upset, they'd be viewed as the team to beat in the conference and likely find themselves ranked next week for the first time since the preseason.

And as Pitt middle linebacker Scott McKillop describes it, the Panthers would be able to wipe away some of the negative vibes that have surrounded the program since losing the season opener to Bowling Green and struggling to beat mediocre teams in each of their past three games.

"Whatever it looked like, whatever people think about it, whatever we did or didn't do right -- we won the game and now we are 3-1 and on a little bit of a roll," McKillop said.

"Now we go to find out where we stand -- South Florida is the measuring stick for the rest of the conference. They are a great team and they've been rolling this year.

"It has been a long time since we got a chance to play on national television with something on the line and we need to capitalize on it -- we need to show that we're a good team, that we can play with good teams and beat them."

Pitt will have a short week to prepare for South Florida, which is coming off a 41-10 victory against North Carolina State, but that could work to the Panthers' advantage. The longer they'd have to watch film of and think about South Florida's firepower, the scarier the game could become.

Pitt coach Dave Wannstedt said the most important fact is that the Panthers, coming off a win, are in a good state of mind.

"I've been around these short weeks," Wannstedt said.

"Every year when I was with the Cowboys, I think four years when I was with the Bears and three years when I was with the Dolphins, we played on Thursday -- Thanksgiving -- and one thing that I think helps you more than anything else is what you do the week before.

"If you do well the week before, if you look back,

teams usually on a short practice, guys aren't as sore, guys are into it and guys are excited to go out and play again.

"So the win [against Syracuse] will definitely give us a chance to prepare as best we can in three days."

The Bulls feature the Big East's top-ranked offense (they average 36.4 points and 464.4 yards of total offense per game). They are ranked third in the conference in scoring defense (16.8 points per game) and ranked No. 1 in total defense (243.8 yards per game).

And the key to the Bulls' success, like that of many teams, is a top-flight quarterback in junior Matt Grothe, who last season was one of only three players in the country, along with Florida's Tim Tebow and Central Michigan's Dan LeFevour, to throw for at least 2,500 yards and rush for 850 yards.

Grothe is elusive, the unquestioned leader of the Bulls, and he is hard to bring down. McKillop said that outside of West Virginia's Pat White, there is no other quarterback the Panthers will face who can hurt them in so many ways.

"I've said this many times -- Matt Grothe is the most underrated quarterback in the country," McKillop said. "He's as good as anyone out there, anyone you can name. He just makes plays and you can see he's matured as a player since he was starting as a freshman.

"Back then he made a lot of plays just on his ability. Now he has ability plus he understands the game much better and he has mastered their offense.

"He's just a very dangerous player and frankly, one of those players who you must account for every single play. We better be ready from the first snap or it will be a long, long day."

# USF's Matt Grothe has a final message for UCF fans

By ILIANA LIMÓN  
*Orlando Sentinel*

09-9-08

The Tampa Tribune's Brett McMurphy posted USF quarterback Matt Grothe's final message to UCF fans on his blog. Grothe led the bulls to a 31-24 overtime win against UCF Saturday at Bright House Networks Stadium.

Grothe's father told the Tribune UCF fans got ahold of his phone number and called him with a death threat. Some UCF fans have questioned the validity of Matt Grothe Sr.'s comments, but Brett McMurphy mentions in the latest blog entry he also interviewed a Florida Highway Patrolman who accompanied Matt Grothe Sr. during the game.

The St. Petersburg Times' Greg Auman also had a story about the death threat.

To be fair, the majority of the UCF fans I saw before the game in tailgate lots and during the game itself were good hosts and showed good sportsmanship.

Rather than try to summarize Grothe's latest (and apparently final) comments to UCF fans, I'll just post McMurphy's complete blog entry filled with loaded remarks sure to upset a lot of Knights:

Yes, University of South Florida QB Matt Grothe has a new cell phone number. He actually laughed when he saw UCF fans holding up his now old phone number (863-559-4559, if you somehow missed it) in the UCF student section at Saturday's game.

However, he didn't think it was too funny that his father, Matt Sr., received a threat from a UCF fan. Grothe's father and a Florida Highway Patrolman told The Tampa Tribune Saturday night that Grothe Sr. received a voice mail that said: "Watch your backs. We can't get to your [expletive] son, but we can get to you."

Grothe said he knew about the threat to his father before Saturday night's kickoff.

"I knew it all," Grothe said. "I knew my dad had gotten a call. I think it helped a little bit with my motivation. Normally I get a little bit of jitters before the game, but I was ready to play some football and take care of business.

"[To a] certain extent you can joke around, but you don't do that - especially since you can't win a football game against us."

While most USF players wanted the series to continue against UCF, Grothe wasn't one of them.

"I don't like their school," he said. "I'm glad we're not playing them anymore. Because we're off to bigger and better things, teams that can hopefully say they're more of a rival."

I asked Grothe if he had one final message for UCF fans. He did.

"Don't mess with something you can't handle," he said.

# Grothe Looking Forward To UCF

By BRETT MCMURPHY

*Tampa Tribune*

09-1-08

TAMPA - University of South Florida QB Matt Grothe said he was just being honest - albeit brutally honest.

Following last year's 64-12 victory against UCF, Grothe was asked if the Bulls intentionally ran it up on the Knights.

"I hope they like what happened," Grothe said on Oct. 13, 2007, "because we weren't trying to run the score up on them. We're that much better than them."

A year later Grothe said he doesn't regret saying it, even though he's sure it will be used as bulletin board material this week.

"It was no disrespect, but we were the better team last year," Grothe said. "We'll see what happens this year. If we come out and play, we should take care of business. We're expected to win."

While the No. 19 Bulls (1-0) routed Tennessee Martin 56-7 Saturday, UCF (1-0) blanked South Carolina State 17-0. Saturday's game in Orlando is the final game in the four-game series, that USF leads 3-0.

Most of USF's players would like to see the series continued.

"I love playing UCF," USF senior FS Danny Verpa-ele said. "It's fun. It's a rivalry."

"My hometown Merritt Island is right next to them. A lot of people from my high school go there. It's a fun game, it's like a rivalry."

"That USF's three wins vs. UCF is in the past, every year is a new year."

**WHAT WENT RIGHT:** Basically everything but the pregame weather.

USF got a ton of players in against UT Martin and emerged basically injury-free. PR Marcus Edwards (seven punt returns, 124 yards), WR A.J. Love (four catches, 57 yards) and RB Ben Williams (six carries, 70 yards) stood out individually.

**WHAT WENT WRONG:** Not much, but to be nit-picky the Bulls had four turnovers, including a fumble into the end zone. Also, an illegal shift by the Bulls nullified a 39-yard TD pass from Grothe to Love or the Bulls could have scored 70.

There were also two dropped passes or Grothe's 6-for-8, 96-yard, two-TD night easily could have been 9-for-9, 150-plus yards and three TDs

**INJURY UPDATE:** TE Trent Pupello (ankle) was on crutches after the game, but said X-rays were negative and he would play Saturday. OT Ryan Schmidt (knee) and RB Mike Ford (ankle), limited against UT Martin, are expected to play Saturday.

**CHALLENGE AHEAD:** The Bulls turned the UCF

series into the Snore on I-4 and go for the four-game sweep Saturday at 7 p.m. (ESPN2). The Bulls make their first - and at least for the near future their last - visit to Bright House Networks Stadium in Orlando.

# Bulls QB Matt Grothe ready to follow up USF's star-crossed season

By CHRIS HARRY  
*Orlando Sentinel*

08-22-08

TAMPA - The South Florida Bulls were several hours removed from embarrassing Interstate-4 rival UCF in a 64-12 pummeling that was about as competitive as a 20-second ultimate fighting bout.

As the ESPN talking heads were sorting out the events of the day, the Bulls were the talk of the college football nation. From unranked and virtually unheard-of when the season started, USF had ascended to the Top 10 and by virtue of the blowout was headed toward the top of the polls and smack in the middle of Bowl Championship Series conversations.

"It was crazy," quarterback Matt Grothe said. "Everything just happened so fast."

Just as insane: Grothe, who threw for two touchdowns and rushed for 100 yards and another two scores against the befuddled Knights, was seeing his name on midseason Heisman Trophy Watch lists.

Seriously, what team -- what player -- could have dealt with so much so soon?

What occurred from there was almost predictable.

Loss. Loss. Loss.

"I don't really think people can understand what we went through," Grothe said. "And I don't think we handled it any differently than anybody else would have."

From fairy tale to fantasy, USF's 2007 season ended with a 9-4 record that proved to be a far more accurate assessment than the lofty rankings that followed the overtime road upset of Auburn and historic nationally televised victory over fifth-ranked West Virginia at sold-out Raymond James Stadium that rocketed the Bulls to No. 2.

Had USF prevailed in any of those three midseason defeats -- at Rutgers, at Connecticut or home against Cincinnati -- the Bulls would have won the Big East Conference and played in their program's first BCS bowl. They settled for the Sun Bowl, where the Bulls were thrashed 56-21 by Oregon.

Grothe and his teammates got a taste of the big time last fall; the good and the bad. The '08 season will be about applying all the lessons they learned.

It starts with Grothe, a junior and preseason All-Big East candidate.

"He's a playmaker. He gets out of jams," said USF Coach Jim Leavitt, whose team will debut ranked 21st in the Associated Press poll. "But he's also got to understand about protecting the football. You hope that he'll do a good job of making those kinds of decisions."

Grothe made some great decisions last year. Some horrible ones, too.

That's been the book on the junior out of Lakeland Lake Gibson -- where he took his team to back-to-back state-championship berths (both losses to Seffner Armwood) -- since he won the starting job as a freshman in '06.

USF is a combined 18-8 the last two seasons. In victories, Grothe threw 25 touchdowns and 13 interceptions. In losses, he threw four touchdowns and 15 interceptions.

The Bulls went 9-0 when he didn't throw an interception.

"Taking care of the ball will be our No. 1 priority this season," passing game coordinator Greg Gregory said.

The Bulls, however, want to get there without clamping down on the creativity of their quarterback. In addition to passing for 2,670 yards last season, Grothe also led the Bulls in rushing with 872 yards and 10 touchdowns. Only two other QBs in the nation had 2,500 yards and 800 rushing yards; one plays in Gainesville.

The rushing numbers are a testament to his agility, which Grothe used on countless occasions to escape trouble in the pocket. Unfortunately, in doing so he sometimes tossed ill-advised passes downfield (like a school-record 382 passing yards, but also four interceptions against Cincinnati); other times he held the ball too long (seven sacks when the team was 6-0 and ranked No. 2 at Rutgers).

USF's passing game puts a lot of responsibility on the quarterback. Too much, sometimes. Against Rutgers, a couple of routine screen passes would have helped against a wicked pass rush, but instead the offense turned to Grothe to make plays; good and bad.

The '08 version of Grothe reported for two-a-days about 20 pounds lighter than where he finished the season. He's still only 6 feet tall, but at a leaner 200 pounds he'll be even quicker and faster than a season ago.

And also vows to be smarter with the football.

"We went through everything -- ups and downs, highs and lows -- so there's nothing we're not prepared for," Grothe said.

"I'm going to expect everything this year, but at the same time I'm not going to worry about what everybody says. If they say, 'Hey, they're No. 2,' we have to stay there this time."

## What you see is...

Dave Glaser  
USFBullsEYE.com Managing Editor

A word of warning: This is a story you've read before. It's going to discuss why Matt Grothe is still the most unassuming star player in college football.

So you ask, why are we who write about USF's program so intrigued by this notion? Well, it's actually pretty simple. We've all seen so many who've gone the other way that it's sometimes difficult to believe that Grothe is Grothe. Can it really be true? Can this kid really be what he seems?

Matt has never stood out from the crowd from a physical standpoint. He's not going to be confused with Tim Tebow or Brian Brohm. He's also not one to draw attention to himself or seek the spotlight. That's why the "Grohawk" of last season seems a bit out of character.

Matt is just Matt. In post-game interviews, he sort of slinks in and out – doesn't particularly announce himself. He still tends to mumble his answers just a bit and rarely makes eye contact. On Saturday night, in the post-spring game interview, he hovered over his Chick-Fil-A sandwich, politely answered all queries and then wandered off into the night. No fanfare. No eager hangers-on waiting for him.

In all honesty, this is the same kid I met four years ago at a USF summer camp when he was ready to enter his senior year at Lake Gibson High. My former partner, Chris Gallen, and I like to take credit for "discovering" Grothe that afternoon – and we first reported his commitment to the Bulls – but clearly the credit for that goes to USF's staff.

I've gotten to know Matthew a little over the past few years and I can honestly tell you I've misread him.

I remember covering USF's fan day in 2005 when I convinced my then 5-year-old daughter to approach Matt for his autograph, thinking it would be a positive for him. He was standing virtually ignored by the crowd of fans eager that day to interact with Andre Hall and other better-known Bulls.

And that same year, I remember running into Grothe at the hotel in Charlotte, N.C. prior to the Meineke Car Care Bowl. He was wandering by himself through the lobby to, no doubt, another team meeting. We chatted for a few minutes and I recall trying to give him a brief pep talk – something enlightening like, "Hang in there. Your time will come."

But I did misread him. He didn't need an autograph seeker or a pep talk. Those things aren't important to Grothe. And there was another one of those moments on Saturday. As we talked, he began to discuss how spring was important for him to keep his job as the Bulls' starter. For an instant, I started to find myself questioning Grothe's sincerity. Then I remembered that it was Matt being Matt.

With all due respect to Grant Gregory, Alton Voss and even incoming phenom B.J. Daniels, there isn't anyone on USF's roster – and probably only a handful of players on rosters across the nation – who could unseat Grothe. But Matthew was serious. And why? Because he'd already seen a two-year

starter eclipsed – up close.

"I think I was actually more settled going into last spring. I know I have to work every day to keep where I am. Pat (Jurmiste) was a starter here for two years when I came in, so it can happen to anybody at any time. My job is just to not let that happen," he said.

If you don't buy that Grothe really believes that, you're not looking at his interview track record. Although all of the Bulls players have been well schooled on how to talk to the media, Matthew will be one to tell it like it is – as he did Saturday.

On his physical shape this spring: "I'm getting older. It seems a little hotter out there and I can tell my body's taken a lot of wear the last couple years."

On backfield mate Mike Ford: "Mike has had an average spring. I don't know what the reason is, but we all know what Mike can do. We saw it last year and we saw it tonight. In a game situation, he'll be fine."

On USF's situation at cornerback: "Everybody's worried about us losing those two corners, but I think we have enough talent and good enough coaches to solve that problem."

So he answered his questions, picked up his now cold chicken sandwich and slowly walked off into the night. That's just Matt being Matt, and I doubt that will change even if he winds up standing at the podium accepting a Heisman Trophy one day.

# Grothe Learns About Tough Losses

By Gary Shelton  
*St. Petersburg Times*  
November 7, 2007

TAMPA - This is where the lessons are learned.

As it turns out, some of them are more difficult than others.

On a perfect Tuesday afternoon in an imperfect season, Matt Grothe walked slowly across the University of South Florida campus. As he paused to avoid a passing car, Grothe looked like just another student with loud hair and a quiet voice on his way to class.

Some students carry a heavier course load than others, however.

And in the case of Grothe, there is suddenly a lot to study.

The world has changed, quickly and cruelly. When a team and its quarterback rise so far and fall so fast, even the dreamers will swear they had doubts all along. Success turns into disappointment and celebrity has turned into second-guessing. Even for a college sophomore, it can be a lot to absorb.

"It's different," Grothe said. "Not the people who are in my face, but other people. Sometimes, I go on the Internet to see what people are saying about me and about the team. The last three weeks, people are trashing the team, and they're trashing me."

Grothe shakes his head.

"And these are supposed to be USF fans."

Such is the way of the world. A man falls down a mountain, and there are those who cannot wait to tell him he shouldn't have been up that high to begin with. A football team follows six straight wins with three straight losses, and there are fans who will insist they were never fooled by the good times.

They are much alike, the quarterback and the program for which he plays. Both are young, both are competitive, both became better faster than anyone would have expected. Also, both are tasting real disappointment for the first time.

Oh, there have been bad days before, defeats that left coaches angry and players disappointed. But the Bulls never had anything at stake before, and without expectations, there is only so much anguish to be mustered.

This was different. This time, fans dared to debate national rankings and Big East championships and Heisman Trophies. This time, something precious was lost along with three games. Innocence, perhaps.

Along the way, Grothe has had his struggles. Against Cincinnati, he had four interceptions and a fumble, and despite all of his yardage (382 yards passing, 457 yards total offense), he was not as sharp as he was early in the season.

Consider this: In Grothe's first three games this year, he had four touchdowns and zero interceptions. In his middle three games, he had three touchdowns and three interceptions.

In his last three games, he has four touchdowns and seven interceptions.

Perhaps it is to be expected. Every game, Grothe seems to throw more, and every game, he seems to run more. Wouldn't you expect the opponents to focus on him? Wouldn't you expect the message boards?

"I get upset at myself a little sometimes," Grothe said. "Some people say, 'Well, a lot is on his shoulders, so he's going to make more mistakes.' But I don't need to make mistakes. I feel like I'm out there for a reason, and I shouldn't be making mistakes."

If you are fair about it, you should notice how much - too much is asked of Grothe. The running game has not developed. The receivers drop a lot of balls. The play-calling can make you scratch your head.

But, yes, Grothe needs to be better, too. For instance: Do you remember that second-quarter interception he threw in the end zone? He seemed to miss his receiver by a hash mark.

"It was just a bad ball," Grothe said. "A bad read."

Over the last three weeks, the losses have left Grothe speechless. He has shown up for only one postgame news conference, that after being prodded by his coaches.

"I just didn't have anything to say," Grothe said. "We needed to play better, and I needed to play better. I thought that was obvious."

There are lessons here. In adversity, there always are. When a team asks a player to throw it 51 times and run in another 22, it needs something else on the menu. The Bulls have to develop a running game that makes defenses adjust. It has to get better receivers.

Also, it has to remember how sweet things were there for a while when USF was rated second in the country.

"That shows us that good things are possible," Grothe said. "And it shows us that they can disappear just like that."

You can say that about the Bulls.

Also you can say it about the player who makes them go.

# Fennelly: Grothe In The Hunt For Heisman

By Martin Fennelly/The Tampa Tribune  
Published: October 16, 2007

TAMPA - The No. 1 quarterback on America's No. 2 team didn't know what the question meant, something about being in New York in December.

December in New York is Heisman time.

When told that later, Matt Grothe was adamant.

'I'm going fishin'. That's my down time.'

So there you have it.

Grothe, South Florida's amazing double threat - 312 yards of offense in the UCF blowout, including 100 rushing and four touchdowns, two by land, two by air - is a long shot for big awards. But he's making a name for himself, even if it's not always his name.

Why, on one of those ESPN channels Sunday, as word of USF being No. 2 spread across the land, someone used the F-word when referring to the undersized Grothe.

Flutie.

'It's cool,' Grothe said.

You heard him. It's cool.

The Grohawk

He was at Busch Gardens the other night for 'Howl-O-Scream' and kept noticing kids in No. 8 Grothe jerseys. Some of the kids were older than him.

Everyone recognized Grothe because of his fame - and his scruffy Mohawk.

Only Grothe's is called a 'Grohawk.'

Matt Grothe plays New York on Thursday night, or at least close enough to it for a genuine buzz. No. 2 USF at Rutgers, on national television, is a grand stage for Grothe and his teammates. They're on top-ranked Ohio State's tail and they know it.

Win and legends grows.

Matt Grothe, the New School Doug Flutie.

Matt Grothe, the little man's Tim Tebow.

Or is Tebow the big man's Grothe?

'I think that's overrated, the size thing,' Grothe said.

What isn't overrated to Grothe is what starts the morning after the Rutgers game, that hunting trip with friend, fellow redshirt sophomore and USF long snapper Eric Setser. They're flying to Setser's hometown of Richwood, Ohio. It's bow season for deer.

They hunted there after the bowl game last season, despite Grothe having broken his leg in the game.

'Nothing was going to stop him,' Setser said. 'That's Matt.'

Imagine, just for fun, Grothe at the Heisman show. He'd be the first attendee to have a camouflage cap in his pocket. That was Grothe's look Monday at USF media day, the huntin' and fishin' king. It's no act.

'Matthew will never change,' his father Matt said.

Matt's son is turning heads.

'He's a phenomenal football player,' Rutgers coach Greg Schiano said.

'He's such a competitor. I remember last year,

he's scrambling near our sideline. He lets one fly. I yell out to the official, 'He's over the line!' Without breaking stride, Matt turned to me and said, 'No, I wasn't!' And he keeps running.'

Matthew will never change.

Hunting For Buckeyes

He has quarterback heroes. Brett Favre is one. Grothe loves Favre's jeans commercial, especially the part with the hunting dog in the pick-up.

Grothe and Setser became friends awful quick. They sit in the hotel room on road trips and watch the outdoors shows nonstop.

Setser thinks America needs to meet his friend.

'I think he is America,' Setser said. 'He wasn't the highest recruited, wasn't the biggest guy, but I tell you, he's got a bigger heart than most people.'

The Grohawk plays New York on Thursday.

Among the ESPN commentators at the game:

Doug Flutie.

It's cool.

Then it's off to Richwood with his bow. Richwood has three traffic lights, Eric Setser said. The closest city is Marysville. The next-closest is Columbus, 45 minutes away, home of The Ohio State University.

Good hunting, Matthew.

# Unpredictable Grothe legs out win

by Brendan Galella  
*St. Pete Times*  
Oct. 7, 2007

"It makes my job a lot easier because with him back there you never know what he's going to do, but he'll find a way to get what we need."

FORT LAUDERDALE - Unable to move the ball effectively through the air, USF quarterback Matt Grothe was forced to revert to his freshman ways.

Instead of the pinpoint passing that helped him complete 63.7 percent of his passes in 2006, the sophomore had to rely on his legs to lead USF to a 35-23 victory Saturday over Florida Atlantic.

"We're struggling throwing the ball. Matt's struggling throwing it," offensive coordinator Greg Gregory said. "He missed a touchdown tonight, missed a crossing route that should have been a big play.

"He's just not throwing well, but it shows you what kind of competitor he is, because he cranked it up running the ball."

For the past two games, Grothe has set a new low for passing yards in any game he has finished, aside from a 47-yard effort against Cincinnati last season.

During the Bulls' upset win Sept. 28 over West Virginia, Grothe was held to 135 yards and threw his first two interceptions of the season.

A subpar performance in Saturday's second half almost let the Owls pull off the upset. Grothe threw eight times, completing three for 20 yards, in the final 30 minutes. He had 122 yards passing overall, going 17-of-27.

"They dropped eight or nine guys and it was hard to find passing lanes," Grothe said. "When the defensive end gave me a corner (to run), it worked out well."

The combination of dropped passes and misjudged throws made Grothe's running mandatory.

He finished with a career-high 120 yards on 14 attempts. Saturday was the first 100-yard game of his career.

Because Grothe demonstrated his rushing skills previously, USF knew its quarterback could handle the burden of becoming one of the primary runners.

"I'm real comfortable with him. Grothe is a great quarterback," defensive end George Selvie said. "I'm really happy with him and I wouldn't take anybody else over him."

In the second half, with the Bulls facing fourth and 1 from the FAU 32-yard line, Grothe ran a keeper and scrambled down the left sideline, cut back to find the end zone and gave USF a lead it wouldn't surrender.

The highlight reel run is something the Bulls have become accustomed to but are trying to avoid so Grothe doesn't have the injury problems he suffered last season.

"He pulls that stuff all the time. The play is never over with Grothe," Bulls center Nick Capogna said.

# South Florida's Grothe a natural under center

By Ivan Maisel  
ESPN.com

The only thing that's not old school about South Florida redshirt sophomore quarterback Matt Grothe is that he's not old. Name another player described as having "moxie," a word that ran out of eligibility years ago.

Yet Bulls coach Jim Leavitt plucked it out of thin air to describe how Grothe took over the offense last season as a redshirt freshman. He led South Florida to a 9-4 record, including a 24-19 upset victory at No. 7 West Virginia.

"I knew that he had the moxie to really be something special," Leavitt said. "And I saw it during two-a-days. How he was going to do, I didn't know. I knew he was a competitor. I knew he was a good football player. I don't want to give him too many accolades yet."

As Leavitt thought out loud, an earlier play popped into his head, from December 2005, when the Bulls prepared to play North Carolina State in the Meineke Car Care Bowl.

"We put our young guys out there and let them scrimmage," Leavitt said. "And Matt threw a seam route, got on top of the ball, to [wide receiver] Taurus Johnson. And I grabbed him right then, I said, 'Matt, you're going to get a great shot in the spring.' I knew right then that we got to really look at this guy. He's pretty impressive."

The 6-foot, 211-pound Grothe is a native of Lakeland, Fla. He threw for 2,576 yards with a 63.7 percent completion rate and also led the Bulls in rushing, with 622 yards and nine touchdowns. Some of those yards Grothe got by being fast. Some he got by putting his head down.

"I played against Matt in high school," said senior center Nick Capogna, who grew up in Clearwater, Fla. "I knew he was talented. I remember I was a senior linebacker -- I thought I was a good athlete back in the day -- and he was a sophomore, this little quarterback just running by me. 'Oh, God. Who the hell was that?' ... He's a playmaker. You get him on the field, he starts making plays. He earned the respect. He's a tough kid. He was getting in D-linemen's face. They would say things, he's pushing them. You like blocking for a guy like that."

Grothe is not afraid to turn that mouth on his teammates.

"He'll let you know if you mess up," Capogna said. "That's what makes him a player. He's just got such a passion to win. That's the thing that's so unique."

And the older players are cool with it?

"You see him play," Capogna said. "how could you not?"

Grothe said his personality on the field has not wavered from the first time he played at age 6. He is proud of the moxie. But there's also another definition for the word: "know-how, expertise." Grothe believes that is his greatest asset. After a season as the starter -- he took over in the second game after

senior Pat Julmiste suffered an injury in the opener -- the game no longer moves at fast forward.

"I've got a lot more weight," Grothe said Tuesday. "I've gotten faster. I weighed 190 at the end of last season. I weighed 211 this morning. ... I feel 100 times better. I can't wait until the season starts."

Grothe said he gained 20 pounds while recuperating from the broken right fibula, which occurred in the first half of USF's 24-7 defeat of East Carolina in the PapaJohns.com Bowl. The good news is that he had a doctor's pass out of winter conditioning. The bad news is that he had to report at 5 a.m. with his teammates, anyway. And watch.

"I used to be so tired after conditioning that I went back to sleep," Grothe said. "This year, sitting there and not doing something for an hour and a half, I woke up and couldn't go back to sleep."

Leavitt wants Grothe to do what all coaches want all young quarterbacks to do: Protect the ball. Grothe threw 15 touchdowns last season, but he also threw 14 interceptions.

"He tried to force too many things at times, because a number of times it works," Leavitt said. He left unsaid that a number of times it didn't.

Grothe is a quick study. By his second start last season, he felt comfortable enough to mix humor into his huddle lectures.

Late in the 24-17 victory over Central Florida, Capogna said, Grothe came in and quoted the college football movie, "The Program": "Let's put the women and children to bed and go look for dinner."

The laughter relaxed the Bulls and they went on to win the game. To have a redshirt freshman quarterback come into the huddle in his second start and crack a joke takes more than a little you know what.

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