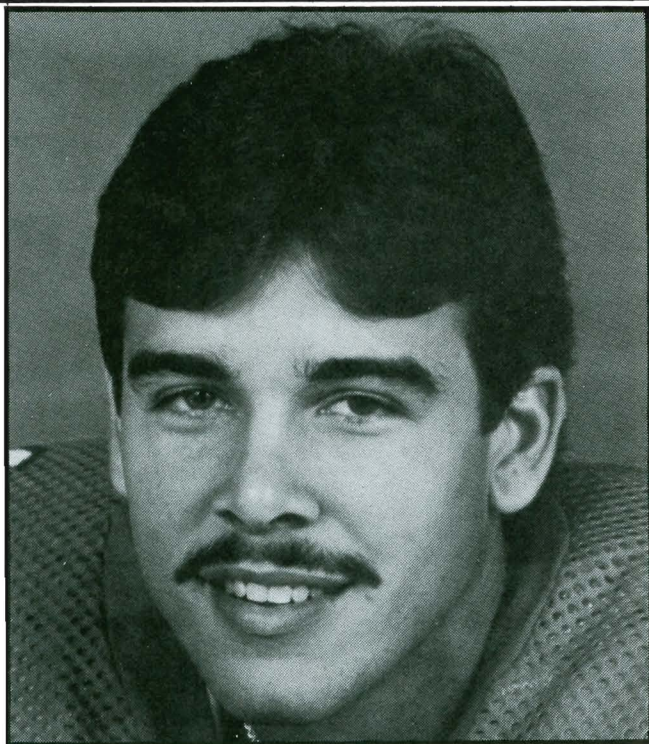


KERWIN BELL

FLORIDA
GATORS
QUARTERBACK



KERWIN BELL: FROM WALK-ON TO HEISMAN TROPHY CANDIDATE

Story by Greg Shepard

Kerwin Bell could have quit a number of times. No one would have blamed him. If he had quit, no one would have known the difference. But Kerwin didn't quit and in the face of adversity and discouragement by others, he had faith in himself and his abilities. For those seeking inspiration in becoming Bigger Faster Stronger mentally and spiritually, the Kerwin Bell story is it.

Kerwin grew up in Lafayette County in North Florida. His father works a farm not far from Day, Florida, population two hundred. The only other town in the county is Mayo which has about 900 people. Folks: we're talkin' small. Everyone goes to Mayo-Lafayette High School and Kerwin's graduating class consisted of 49 seniors. Obviously the high school is a class A school which is in Florida's lowest enrollment classification.

Kerwin was a three-sport athlete who excelled in football, basketball and baseball. As an 8th grader, he made the J.V. football team and stood 5-10 and weighed 135 pounds. They, as a sophomore, Kerwin became the starting varsity quarterback. He was now 6-2, 165 pounds and managed to throw for 930 yards, 13 TD's and 10 interceptions for a 10-1 record. Then a dream came true, as Kerwin led his team to a perfect 13-0 record and a Florida State Championship his junior year. He threw for a prolific 1700 yards, 27 TD's and only 6 interceptions!

As a result, Kerwin got a great number of questionnaires from colleges all over the nation. He filled every one of them out. Now, as a 6-3, 180 pound senior, he again passed for 1700 yards but only 16 TD's and 8 interceptions. The team was hit hard by graduation the year before and so Kerwin's team managed a 9-3 season. Kerwin was now ready to accept scholarship offers after a career 32-4 record.

But alas, Kerwin Bell received no responses from all those questionnaires except from Division II Valdosta State in southern Georgia. Then to add to the disappointment, Valdosta State decided to go after Junior College Players and so Kerwin received no offers to play.

"Mentally, at first, I got really upset. But I felt I could play. I felt the only reason for my rejection is the fact that I came from a small school. I knew I had a good arm," Kerwin remembered confidently. "I talked the situation over with my parents and they agreed to pay my way to a major college. I decided to walk on at Florida because I had watched the Gators play from boyhood."

Kerwin continued, "I came down to see spring ball my senior year of high school and they said they'd give me a fair shot. However, when I arrived as a walk-on freshman, I had to start at the bottom. Not at all like the scholarship players. I got torn shoes and poor equipment. But after the first day, I could tell. I could play! I was as good as anyone else. They began to notice me during scrimmages on Mondays when I was with the junior varsity."

Kerwin was red shirted his first year. He worked himself up to 5th team for spring ball. During the spring game, Kerwin got in for only four plays. Kerwin Bell knew this was his first real chance to show his abilities. All four plays were pass plays. Kerwin scrambled once for a gain and threw three for three with one TD pass.

Then QB coach Galen Hall told Kerwin that he was the QB of the future but he'd still be on the scout team. At this time Valdosta State called and said they'd now offer a scholarship and that he could play right away. But Kerwin had his goals and dreams set. He wanted to play major college ball. He elected to stay at Florida as a 5th team QB and work hard to move up.

Then things started to happen. Kerwin moved up to 4th team because one QB had bad grades and was ineligible. Kerwin worked hard that August and had fine practice stats. These stats moved Kerwin up to 2nd team behind 5th year senior QB Dale Dorminey. Then four days before Kerwin's first varsity game against defending national champion University of Miami, Dale Dorminey hurt his knee.

That night in the cafeteria, Coach Hall told Kerwin that he'd be the starting quarterback. Kerwin turned his tray in full of food. He couldn't eat. So here he was . . . 15 months out of little Mayo-Lafayette County High School. A walk-on about to take on the Hurricanes.

"I was a little shaky the first half but we only trailed 13-10. Then with four minutes left, behind 19-13, we drove 60 yards to go up 20-19. The good thing about that drive was that we converted two crucial 4th down plays. The bad thing was that Bernie Kosar led the Hurricanes to a comeback win in the last 40 seconds," lamented Kerwin.

That was to be the only loss that season for the Gators of Florida. They finished with a sparkling 9-1-1 season and a 3rd in nation final AP poll rating. Last season, Kerwin again led Florida to a 9-1-1 season and finished 5th in the final AP poll. His two year passing record is 4,301 yards, 37 TD's and only 15 interceptions. Kerwin has completed 278 passes out of 472 attempted. Kerwin is now 6-3, 210 pounds and benches 270 pounds.

Kerwin has spent the past summer in Gainesville which is home to the Florida Gators. Here he threw everyday for about one hour. He gets with his receivers to practice timing and patterns. His roommate and wide receiver Bret Wiechmann comes out a lot to practice.

Kerwin Bell was named as a team QB in the South East Conference last season as well as an Honorable Mention All-American. He was 1st team sophomore All-American. Further honors came to Kerwin as he was named the "Amateur Athlete of the Year" in the state of Florida. Perhaps his most prestigious honor came out of Atlanta at WTBS as he was named the "National Collegiate Player of the Year!" Not bad for a farm boy who was turned down by Valdosta State.

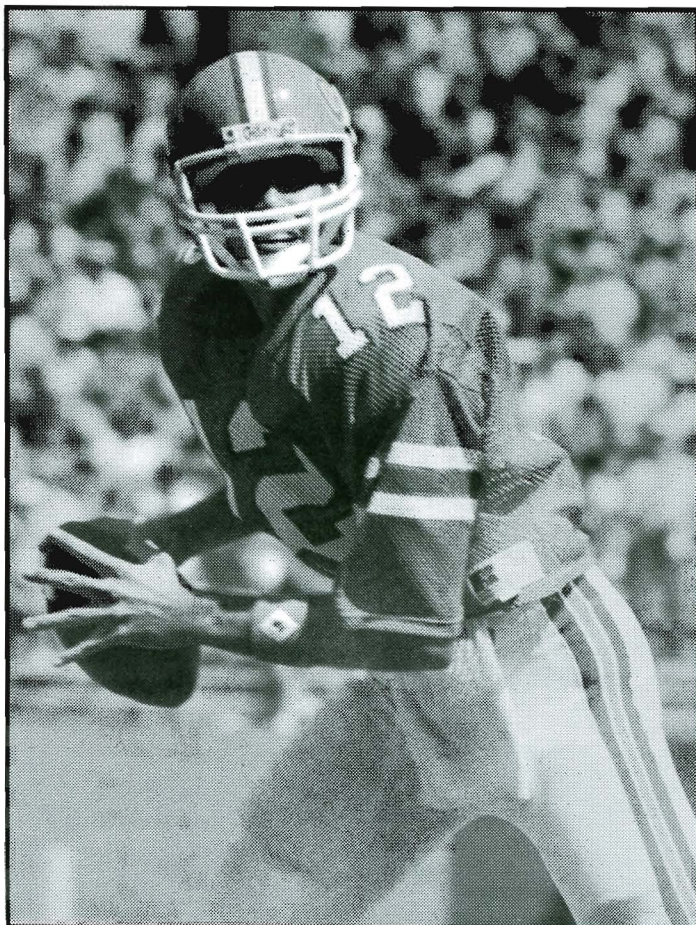
Kerwin's advice. "Set goals in your life if you want to accomplish things. Keep trying. Never give up!"

I asked Kerwin about drugs. He responded, "I've never messed with drugs. I speak to youngsters a lot about drugs. I consider myself in a leadership position. It's important that I take on the responsibility of being a leader. Anybody can be a follower. Heck, I don't even drink. Orange juice tastes a lot better."

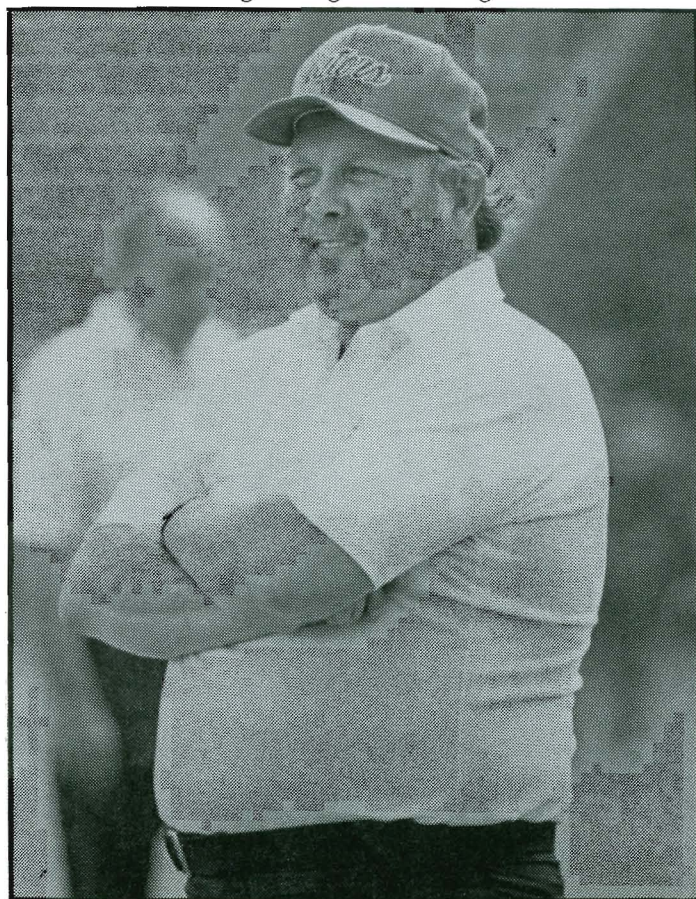
Kerwin continued to tell me about his education. "I only need 33 more hours to graduate. I'll finish on time. I'm getting my Liberal Arts and Science degree with a major in Psychology. I've had to take some summer courses to make up for some light class loads during the season but it's worth it to finish on time. My G.P.A. is 2.7. I'll have a fifth year here at Florida because of my red-shirt season so I'll use that year to get a Masters Degree in Athletic Administration."

Kerwin Bell is a member of F.C.A. and believes the spiritual part of life is also important. I asked Kerwin about the Heisman Trophy. "I think about it sometimes," he mused, "but two years ago all I wanted to do was make the team. Anyway my team goals are more important. My top goal is to be successful by hard work not by something cheap. If you earn it, you can be proud of it. My parents taught me that," Kerwin concluded.

We thank Kerwin Bell for his special spirit that he has portrayed. His courage in sticking with his goals should be an inspiration to us all.

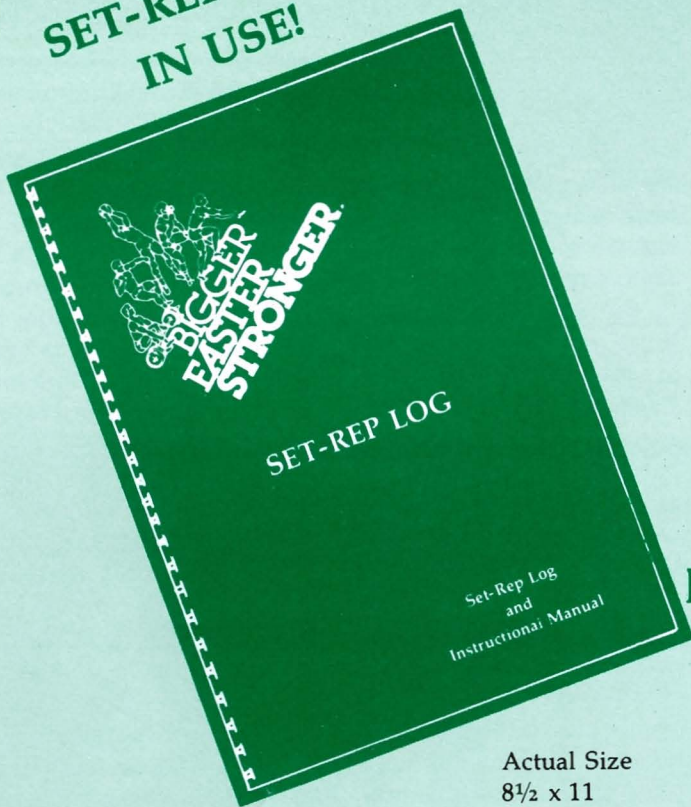


Kerwin Bell setting his sights even higher this season.



Coach Galen Hall: His walk-on turned into pure gold. 5

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