



THIS WEEK'S PROGRAM

August 8, 2023

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UNCC Head Football Coach Biff Poggi

by Elly Clary

“We don’t have a rival,” the Charlotte 49ers head football coach told Rotarians. “When we beat somebody, we’ll all of a sudden have a rival.”

It drew laughs but was representative of no-nonsense remarks delivered by Coach Biff Poggi. He’s preparing a team with his imprint for competition in the American Athletic Conference which the 49ers joined in July.

Poggi arrived at the special meeting location, Noble Smoke, wearing a jersey and shorts, straight from morning practice. Since taking the helm earlier this year, he has brought in about 50 recruits.

Formerly associate head coach at Michigan, he’s credited for having much to do with the impressive success of that Big 10 team under Coach Jim Harbaugh. He spoke of building a strong defense and running attack and shutting down the opponent.

But he stuffed most of his remarks into an extended Q&A. Here are the highlights:

To improve players’ attitudes toward academics, he color-coded grades, with lower letters getting either a red or yellow designation. Better marks received green. “If you have a yellow or red grade, that means you will not practice that week. If you don’t practice, you don’t play.” Grades improved.

He acknowledged the Charlotte 49ers have a collective, or fund for compensation of players for their name, image, or likeness (NIL). The rise

of the NCAA transfer portal means 49er coaches find many athletes who want to leave their current school for a new place to play. They often seek NIL money.

A successful hedge fund executive for almost four decades, Poggi said Charlotte's profile as a banking and finance center influenced his decision to accept the 49er offer. He and UNC Charlotte have established player internships at major financial institutions and that's another recruiting tool. Charlotte sells itself when recruits see its vibrant center city, then admire the 49er campus, stadium, and football facilities.

Poggi grew up hard in Baltimore's Italian section and tries to be a positive influence for his players. To help them handle adversity, he aspires to build a rock-solid program. "Life is a marathon, not a sprint." He promotes a positive response to any setback.

He amplified comments he made on sports radio about expecting more financial support for the football program. Many who can donate to athletics hold allegiances to other universities, but he hopes they will help the 49ers. "Charlotte needs football to be successful and we can't do it without help."

He hopes to lure more talented players from this area. "The football talent here is some of the best in the nation."

Consolidation in football conferences continues. "Our goal is not to be in anything that is not a super league."

And what is his favorite local Italian eatery? It's a small spot near UNC Charlotte called Giacomo's.

*Please note: This meeting was in-person only. Video conferencing was not available.