

Tampa CEO earns young alumnus award

By JOEY JOHNSTON
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The University of Florida course was called "Estate and Gift Tax." Most students were just weeks away from earning their accounting degree. Everyone was getting itchy for the start of a career, that initial job.

And this class began at 7:25 a.m.

"It's almost a feeling of 'just give me my grade and let me go,'" said Debbie Garvin, professor of that course some 13 years ago and former associate director of UF's Fisher School of Accounting. "I guess with that early hour, with that kind of environment, it's where you can discover a lot about a person."

It's where Garvin discovered [Nick Reader](#).

"He showed up every day with an engaging smile and personality," Garvin said. "You can kind of tell when somebody is going through the motions and when somebody really wants to learn the material. You could tell he had a solid foundation and he was really interested in being the best he could be."

For **Reader**, it's still true today.

On April 10, Reader, 35, returned to Gainesville for the Orange and Blue spring football game. He was honored by UF as an Outstanding Young Alumnus, a program established by UF's Alumni Association to recognize leaders in business and community service who are younger than 40.

Reader is chief executive officer of MVP Holdings, a private investment firm created by Outback Steakhouse founder Bob Basham. **Reader** oversees the firm's investments, raises capital for acquisitions and handles day-to-day management of its holdings, including the Lee Roy Selmon's restaurant chain.

From 2003-08, Reader was chief financial officer for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, becoming the NFL's youngest CFO at the time. He worked with then-General Manager Bruce Allen to oversee the collective bargaining agreement, salary cap issues and player contract negotiations. He also helped to secure financing for the Bucs' \$40 million corporate headquarters, which opened in 2006.

Reader began his public accounting career at PriceWaterhouseCoopers, where he rose quickly through the audit ranks and was twice promoted with the national firm.

As he stood on the turf at Florida Field, where he played as a member of [Jesuit High School's](#) 1992 state runner-up team and once imagined himself performing on a college team, **Reader** thought about all of the people who helped his career.

He remembered John Siphthig, a mentor at PriceWaterhouseCoopers. He thought about Allen and Coach Jon Gruden, with whom he worked closely in an NFL front office. He focused on Basham's leadership and cutting-edge techniques, something he experiences nearly every day.

But mostly, he thought about his wife, Melanie, and their two children, Tre, 7, and Troy, 5. At **Jesuit**, **Reader** was an offensive lineman, and Melanie was his girlfriend. **Reader's** football dreams were stopped by an injury. In his first semester at Florida, still a bit disgruntled about the end of his athletic career, his grade point average was 2.86.

"Melanie started at the University of Central Florida, then transferred to Florida," Reader said. "Ever since I started off not so good academically, mostly through Melanie's influence, I don't think I ever went under 3.8 after that. She helped me get my priorities straight and kept my eye on the ball.

"No matter what you do, it always comes back to having a great wife and family. That's your real foundation. And I have a great wife and a great family."

Reader said his UF experience remains the biggest influence on his career.

"It taught you the right work ethic," **Reader** said. "You learned how to work hard, but then you realized there were rewards that came with that.

"Then, through the years, with all of my mentors, you pick up the importance of treating people right, investing in people, believing in people. You can have all the knowledge and expertise in the world, but you've got to know how to treat people."

By all accounts, that is a skill **Reader** has mastered.

"It's really fun to go anywhere in the Tampa Bay area with Nick because he knows everybody," Basham said. "He's the kind of person you want to work with, the kind of person you want as your representative. He's tough-minded in business matters, certainly, but he also understands what makes people tick and how to relate to everyone."

Dominick Ciao, **Reader**'s football coach at **Jesuit**, remembers him as an ultra-dependable performer, one who consistently graded out the highest on a talented offensive-line unit.

A year later, after Ciao left Jesuit and before he landed at Berkeley Prep, he secured a part-time position with the Bucs, something to keep him around the game. It was mostly behind the scenes, breaking down film with defensive coordinator Monte Kiffin. In that setting, Ciao easily could've been ignored by the organization's brass.

But the Bucs' CFO was **Nick Reader**, Ciao's former player.

"Nick was always checking up on me, making sure everything was OK," Ciao said. "I was a part-time guy, but he made sure everybody knew who I was. He was proud to introduce me as his high school football coach. That meant a lot to me.

"That's just the kind of guy he has always been - special. You always had the feeling he would be really successful."

At every step of his career, people have been saying that about **Nick Reader**, all the way back to his optimistic presence in UF's Fisher School of Accounting.

Reader recently told Garvin he wants to establish an internship program at MVP Holdings for UF accounting students.

"You always try to follow your former students and hope they are doing well with their companies and in their community," Garvin said. "Since he left Gainesville to go out into the world, Nick has done just that, and we're really proud of him."