

THE ROCK ROLLS INTO FLORIDA

Football gives Slippery Rock alumni reason to cheer

Commentary by Howard Schnellenberger

For years, Russell Wright has hosted Slippery Rock University's annual South Florida alumni gathering at his wonderful Wright-by-the-Sea resort.

I imagine that the event in years past was a nostalgic reunion of old friends and the always-present request for funds to support their alma mater.

By special invitation to President Anthony J. Cantanese, members of FAU's administration and I attended last week's Slippery Rock alumni event. This time there was a great sense of celebration for the day when "The Rock" invades Pro Player Stadium, home of the Fighting Owls.

Slippery Rock President Warren Smith and his staff are veterans of this annual gathering. For the first time, Coach Mihalik and the athletic director attended to infuse new purpose and to charge all faithful sons and daughters of Slippery Rock to be on hand September 1.

Enthusiasm reigned so high that alumni had visions of a billboard to herald the coming of September 1.

Posted at Pro Players Stadium, the billboard will inform Dolphin pre-season game-goers of what I believe is, if not the most important, the most inspirational game of Slippery Rock's proud tradition.

Moving through the crowd, I met big Rocks and little Rocks, young and old, who shared sheer joy in anticipation of their game in south Florida.

President Smith and Coach Mihalik will bring Slippery Rock football to them — an event that Wright confessed to me was beyond his wildest dreams or greatest hope.



I experienced the very essence of college sports: seeing people who have no good reason to get together, who have no excuse to be so excited except for the thrill of their alma mater and love for the game of football.

At age 95, Wright, who has had his life shaped, driven and interwoven to Slippery Rock, wanted to be a teacher and graduated with an education degree in 1923. He earned his medical degree and took his skills to Detroit, where he served as team doctor for the Lions and the Pistons before taking respite right by the sea in Delray Beach.

Wright and countless loyal alumni find themselves thousands of miles away from their universities, wanting to be on hand to cheer for their team. He, like many citizens in Paradise, has been without a local football program to cheer for these many years.

Now, for the first time in the history of Paradise, transplanted zealots of college football will adopt a new love for a new team and become fans of the heart for this new kid on the block.

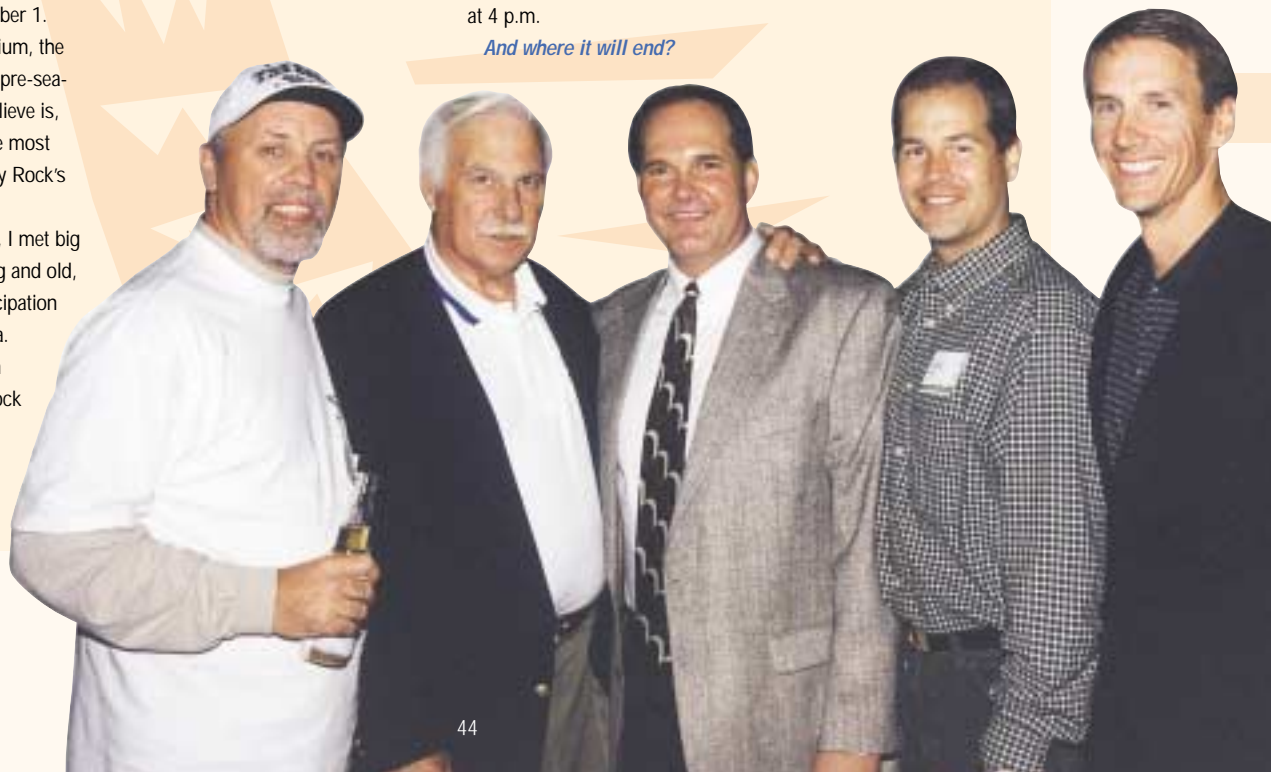
It begins on September 1, 2001 with Florida Atlantic University hosting Slippery Rock at Pro Player Stadium at 4 p.m.

And where it will end?

Alumni gathered in March at Delray Beach to hear Rock Coach George Mihalik and legendary football coach Howard Schnellenberger, who has been working for three years to start FAU's football program.

SRU won the ceremonial coin-toss (photo left), but the one that counts will be on September 1, when FAU plays its first game against SRU. (l-r) George Mihalik, President Smith and Howard Schnellenberger.

Former Rock football players enjoyed talking about past and current gridiron feats and speculating on the outcome of the game with FAU. (l-r) Ken Klammer, '72; Schnellenberger, Mihalik, '74; Andy Major, '88; and Kirk Hoza, '85.



FAU head football coach Howard Schnellenberger writes exclusively for The Boca Raton News

Equally eager, but with mixed loyalties, are five Rock alumnus with Florida Atlantic University. Standing are: Dr. Weppner, '54, director of volunteers; Johnnie Stover, '70, English faculty; and Kirk Hoza, '85, defensive coordinator at FAU. Seated are Keith Klahold, '97, strength coach; and Amy Morley, '97, assistant trainer.



Well-known area alumnus, Dr. Russell Wright, '23, hosted the reception at his Wright-by-the-Sea resort. He's shown welcoming friend of SRU Grady Cooper who was visiting from Slippy Rock and thanking the gathering for being supportive of SRU.

MAKING FOOTBALL HISTORY IN FLORIDA

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 1 4:00 PM PRO PLAYER STADIUM, MIAMI

The Rock takes on Florida Atlantic University in FAU's first ever football game



Pregame alumni reception in the stadium's club level



For more information, contact the SRU Alumni Relations Office at 1-800-GET-ROCK



Our team will be staying at the Marriott Marina, Fort Lauderdale.
Reception at the Marriott Friday evening, August 31