



Football Operations Center celebrates 100-year tradition of Golden Eagle football

“Tennessee Tech is awesome — there’s no denying that.”

Tennessee Tech Head Football Coach Dewayne Alexander, '89 political science and '98 M.A., knows Golden Eagle football. He played football for Tech from 1985-87 and is now in his fourth season as head coach. He also served as Tech's assistant head coach and offensive line coach from 2013-15 and was acting head coach in 2015-16. To say that “Coach A” is committed to Tech is an understatement.

“I’ve personally experienced the value of an education that opened doors for me,” said Alexander. “I want that for our student-athletes as well.”

Golden Eagle football has a long, proud tradition. Tech played its first football game, against Cumberland University, in fall 1922 and claimed its 100th football win in 1951 against Carson-Newman. In almost 100 years of football, nearly two million people have attended a Tech football game. And Tech football extends beyond students and alumni; visitors from across the state and beyond attend games.

As Tech approaches the 100th anniversary of Golden Eagle football, President Phil Oldham announced plans for a Football Operations Center on campus.

“Success in Tech football transforms our campus, city and community,” said Oldham. “Winning fuels energy and passion in communities, economies and campuses. There is no substitute for winning. Building a new Football Operations Center is about more than rekindling a strong tradition in Golden Eagle football. It’s about leaping into a future where players, fans, alumni, businesses and supporters take on the team’s identity as part of themselves.”

The Football Operations Center will be located next to the Athletics Performance Center, across from Hooper Eblen Center. The 40,000-square-foot facility is designed with football recruits and current student-athletes in mind. It will place specific emphasis on technology, with touch screens and displays in the lobby, and will be the primary sports medicine, athletics training and physical therapy facility for all 14 athletics teams and approximately 325 student-athletes. It will feature a lighted practice field, Football Academic Success Center with computer lab, contemporary team locker room, film room, hospitality suite, coaches’ offices, hydrotherapy room and physical therapy center.

“As a player and as a coach, I’ve traveled across the country, and I know we have the best community, the best town, the best campus,” said Alexander. “Parents and prospective student-athletes who visit our football program love Cookeville and Tennessee Tech. But we need quality football facilities to show our players that we are committed to them.”

Chris Tucker, a senior defensive lineman from Jackson, Tennessee, says he has enjoyed seeing how much

campus has transformed during his time at Tech and is excited to see the plan for a Football Operations Center.

“A new facility will attract recruits who are eager to be successful and dominate in their sport,” said Tucker. “Although I will not be an active member of the Golden Eagles when a new facility is built, I still want the best for my younger teammates and the future athletes who will attend Tech. I will always remember what it felt like to be a Golden Eagle, and I can confidently say there is no feeling like it.”

Recognizing the need for this facility, two Tech alumni who are also Foundation Board members and football fans committed to the project early on. M. Dianne Murphy and Ottis Phillips have devoted their time, talent and philanthropy to the project to ensure that the next generation of players have a quality facility on campus.

M. Dianne Murphy

In addition to earning two degrees from Tech, M. Dianne Murphy, '72 health and physical education and '73 M.A., played basketball, volleyball and tennis for the university. She went on to earn a Ph.D. from Florida State University and served as athletics director for the University of Denver and Columbia University.

“Athletics is seen as the front porch of a college or university because of the visibility that it brings to campus and the local community,” said Murphy. “A winning athletics program helps with campus pride. It helps with community pride. It helps with attracting students and faculty to the college or university.”

Murphy says her strong belief in Tech Athletics inspired her to make a leadership gift to the Football

Operations Center early in the planning phase, and she has included Tech in her estate plans as well.

"I've worked at some wonderful institutions, and I have supported all of them philanthropically," she explained. "And I've been asked by several if I would leave my estate to them, and I thought long and hard about that. And what I realized is that my estate gift will come to Tennessee Tech. It's a way for me to give back to an institution that gave me a lot, and I also know that my gift will make a difference here. And that's important to me. That's how much I care about this place."

Ottis and Cindy Phillips

Ottis Phillips, '74 mechanical engineering and '78 MBA, was a member of the Golden Eagle football team from 1969-72 and credits Tech and his experience in athletics for his career success.

"I cherish my experience and the people I met and the things I learned," said Phillips. "Football has emotional ties to the people that you worked so hard with 50 years ago, and you carry those friendships for the rest of your life."



At one time, 70% of the university's budget came from the state. Today, it is closer to 30%, and the state does not support building or maintenance expenses for athletic facilities. Phillips says he knows private support must fill in that gap, and he believes his investment will pay off. Tech contributes \$765 million annually to the Upper Cumberland, and the football program alone supports more than 140 student-athletes, coaches and support staff.

"I was blessed to be a part of a time when there was a tremendous investment being made in football facilities at Tech," Phillips said. "When I look at the success of Tech football back then, the facilities played a huge part in that. Tech won two OVC championships between 1972 and 1975, and it was thanks to outstanding athletes, facilities and coaches."

Several other Tech football alumni and friends have recognized the need for a Football Operations Center and have stepped forward to make a significant gift to the project.

Steve S. and Amy L. Dennison

Steve Dennison, '71 marketing, played football for Tech in the late '60s and remembers when Tucker Stadium opened. In fact, Dennison actually received the opening kickoff in the first college game played in the new stadium! More than 50 years later, Dennison still remembers that game; it was September 1966, and Tech played the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga.

Like so many Golden Eagle football alumni, Dennison says his teammates became lifelong friends, and Tech prepared him for life and a career after football.

"I'm really thankful for folks like Ottis and many others who have really stepped up to make the

Football Operations Center a soon-to-be reality," said Dennison. "I feel very fortunate to have attended Tennessee Tech, and I know it contributed heavily to my 50-year business career."

Larry Schreiber

Larry Schreiber, '71 marketing, was an Associated Press All-American, three-time All-OVC Performer and Conference Player of the Year. He played in the NFL for six seasons with the San Francisco 49ers and the Chicago Bears and was inducted into the Tennessee Tech Sports Hall of Fame in 1980.

Schreiber's experience at Tech almost ended after his sophomore year, when several universities encouraged him to transfer. He considered their offers but ultimately chose to stay at Tech.

"I decided Tech was the right place for me," he explained. "Not only was Tech the only school that had enough faith in me to offer me a scholarship my first year when no one else did, but I gained much more than support from my university. I learned the benefits of teamwork, discipline, self-confidence and sportsmanship. I also realized it wasn't only about myself, but it was also about my teammates, my community and the City of Cookeville."

Schreiber compares the Football Operations Center to the movie Field of Dreams.

"If you build it, they will come," he said. "For Tech to compete in today's world, it needs to have the best facilities, both on and off the field. The recruits today will go where they feel they will be supported and have the best possible chance of being successful."

Schreiber says that a state-of-the-art facility focused on athletic excellence in football will allow Tech to demonstrate a commitment not just to be great academically, but on the field as well.

"I have experienced places, met people and have seen more than I could ever believe was possible," said Schreiber. "Tech gave me that opportunity. I'm sure if you look back on your Tech days, you will say the same."

John C. Jones III and Tracy Jones

John C. Jones III, '91 marketing, says he doesn't know of anything that has had a greater impact on his life than his time playing football for the Golden Eagles.

"I'm at an age where you really start to reflect on defining moments in your life, and I look back very fondly at my time at Tennessee Tech," he said. "Football was the catalyst that got me here, and it's something that I believe molded me into the person I became. It was four years that really gave me structure, brotherhood and dealing with struggle and adversity, and that helped set me on the right course for any success I've had and for a lot of good things that happened in my life."

Each person who makes a significant gift to the Football Operations Center will have the chance to name a space inside the building, and Jones chose to use his gift to name the offensive line assistant coach's office in honor of former Tech Coach L. T. Helton.

"He was an old-school, hard-nosed tough coach, but what I realized is that he brought more out of me than I knew or thought I had or thought I could do," said Jones.

Jones says he wants future players to know they are cared for because that is what he remembers about his time at Tech — how the people of Cookeville and the surrounding community support Tech's student-athletes.

"Tennessee Tech is an incredible place," he said. "I think if we get the football facilities and stadium on the right track, there's absolutely no reason we can't compete at the highest level."

Frank T. and Molly S. Omiyale

Frank Omiyale credits his Tech coaches, including Mike Hennigan, Steve McAdoo, Russ Ehrenfeld and Dewayne Alexander, for developing the skills needed to play in the National Football League.

"Tech taught me to use my voice and to be confident," Omiyale explained. "I learned technique and mental toughness at Tech, and these are things I had in my toolbelt when I went on to play in the NFL."

One of the top offensive linemen in the Ohio Valley Conference during his four-year career on the Golden Eagle football team, Omiyale was a first-team all-OVC selection and an All-America honoree. He was selected by the Atlanta Falcons in the fifth round of the 2005 NFL draft and spent eight seasons in the NFL. In 2015, he was inducted into the Tennessee Tech Sports Hall of Fame.

While Omiyale was drafted by the Falcons before graduating, he never forgot about Tech. Following his retirement from the NFL, he returned to Tech and graduated with a degree in marketing in 2014.

"Tech is special to me," Omiyale explained. "I never dreamed of going to college, but I received an

opportunity to attend and play at Tech, and I wanted to make the most of that opportunity.”

Omiyale says he wants what’s best for Tech — both today and for years to come — and believes in investing in areas that will encourage student-athletes to attend the university.

“When I think about the NFL, we were exposed to great facilities,” said Omiyale. “This is one of the reasons I’m so excited about the Football Operations

Center. Great facilities keep players on the field and develop their skills. We are all competing for a championship, and I want to give these guys something to be proud of.”

Ryan K. and Julia A. Weeks

Tennessee Tech Sports Hall of Fame member and All-American Ryan Weeks, ’91 mechanical engineering, says the Football Operations Center presented his family with an opportunity to give back to Tech and to



ensure the football facilities are on par with other OVC and Football Championship Subdivision schools.

“Tech academics and athletics opened more doors for me than I ever could have imagined, so it is my family’s privilege to support an effort that might provide other Tech student-athletes with similar opportunities,” he said.

Weeks’ senior season was Coach Jim Ragland’s fourth season and the final season of Ragland’s first freshman class.

“Many people say that season was a springboard to Tech’s success in the 1990s,” Weeks said. “So, it is nice to think that our class and the classes that came before us helped get something started.”

Weeks says Tech’s academic programs prepare students for the technical elements of their future careers, and college athletics prepare them for other aspects of life.

“No matter who we are and where we came from, we are a team, we have a common goal and we are in it together — win or lose,” he said. “And regardless of each outcome, we will get up again tomorrow and give it another go. That is sports, and that is life.”

Alfonzo D. and Neischa Alexander

Alfonzo Alexander, ’91 business management, graduated from Tech 30 years ago and says he supports a Football Operations Center so the next 30 years of Golden Eagle football — and beyond — can be successful.

“I hope that Tech is able to attract talented student-athletes to contribute to the program,” he said. “And I

hope that it gives them the ability to grow as men, to grow as students and athletes and be a refuge for them when they need an escape. They can go to a lounge area or meeting room with their teammates and enjoy the comradery and the fellowship. It can be a space of their own.”

Alexander played in leadership positions including quarterback and free safety, and he made calls in the huddle that guided the rest of the team.

“I really developed some of my leadership skills through playing football for Tech,” he said. “In every role I’ve had in my career since then, and in the businesses that I now run, I have had to be an effective leader.”

Alexander says Tech taught him about diversity and how to work through adversity.

“Being an athlete at Tech helped me understand how to interact with people different than me — who looked different, who thought different, who came from different backgrounds,” he said. “And Tech taught me how to work through adversity. There are going to be some things that go your way and some things that don’t, and how you respond to that is critically important. And football at Tennessee Tech helped me understand that.”

Kevin W. Sharp

While Kevin Sharp played football at Tech for only one year — when his previous school dropped their football program after his junior season — he says he made a lot of friends in a short time.

“My fondest memories are of the people and how welcoming they all were to an upperclassman



‘outsider,’” he said. “Tech prepared me to be far away from home, without any local support system other than football, and how to really be on my own. And it taught me how to overcome adversity.”

While Sharp wasn’t at Tech for long, he still has fond memories of Dewayne Alexander and the other Tech players and coaches. Sharp and Alexander played together in the ’80s, and Sharp says Alexander being named head coach is the reason he has chosen to support the Football Operations Center.

“Dewayne is the right man for the job,” Sharp said. “Hopefully my gift will help in some small way.”

Rob and Jennifer R. Norred

Rob Norred, ’84 business management, was a member of Tech’s football team from 1980-84, and he too had the opportunity to play alongside Dewayne Alexander.

“For me, it’s all about the students,” Norred said. “I want the student-athletes to have a better facility than what exists now and what existed when I played. There will never be a time at Tennessee Tech where they do not need me and many others to help make Golden Eagle football and the student-athlete experience better, so I am happy to be a donor.”

Norred admits that while he's not sure that his time playing football made him a better lawyer, he says that participation in any college sport makes one a better and more competitive person.

"The fondest memories were the relationships developed with other players, coaches and faculty," said Norred. "A genuine understanding of athletics and the commitment needed to be your best is the same commitment that is needed for all aspects of life."

Danny and Karen Brooks

Danny Brooks, '03 interdisciplinary studies, attended Tech from 1977-79 and played football for the Golden Eagles. He is one of a few alumni, including current head coach Dewayne Alexander, who had the honor of both playing and coaching for Tech. Brooks coached under Jim Ragland in the '90s.

"I still have friends today who I played with here or coached here," he said. "You really can't describe the friendships that you build while being on an athletic team. They are lasting relationships you will have your entire life."

While Brooks graduated a number of years after his football days, Tech remained an important part of his life. He has supported Tech football for nearly 40 years and says he is excited to see progress on a new football facility for Tech.

"At my age and considering how long I have supported Tech, if this is finally going to happen I didn't want it to happen without me," he explained.

Brooks says that regarding academics, there is no question why a student would choose to attend

Tech, and he simply wants the athletics program to match.

"I've had a love for this school for many, many years, and it's time for us to take Tech Athletics to the level that it should be," he said. "The only way to do that is for the people who love Tech as much as I do to step up. There are a lot of alumni, like me, whose lives changed because of Tech. The time is now — it's not sometime in the future — it's right now that this needs to happen."

The Future of Golden Eagle Football

"We have challenged ourselves to do more than catch up with other teams," said President Oldham. "We plan to jump ahead of competitors."

The Football Operations Center is Phase I of a comprehensive upgrade and expansion plan for Tech Football. Phase II includes a reimagined, reinvigorated and reinvented Tucker Stadium, providing significant upgrades to both the player and fan experience. More information can be found at tntech.edu/foc.

Nothing brings a community together like a winning team. A respected academic reputation combined with strong athletics create the diverse, vibrant campus culture prospective students want. Tech's Football Operations Center ensures future generations will experience what football alumni have experienced on campus for nearly 100 years and how current defensive lineman Chris Tucker describes being a Golden Eagle today.

"There is no feeling like it."