

Dear Dr. Watts:

We are writing today to express our concern over the decision to cancel the football program at UAB. As coaches in the Birmingham area we have seen the good, the bad and the ugly of UAB football. We believe the decision to kill the program will do damage to UAB, to our community, and to opportunities for student-athletes in the state of Alabama.

As coaches we drill into our athletes the dangers of making mistakes and how they can kill a drive, cause a shift in momentum, or even alter the final outcome of a game. We believe dropping football is a costly mistake.

Sometimes the impact of a mistake is immediately obvious, such as a pass intercepted and returned for a touchdown. Some mistakes are more subtle – but can be just as disastrous. For example, there is a missed opportunity when a team is driving towards a touchdown and a fumble is lost. A game with too many lost opportunities, more often than not, will lead to a loss.

We believe the missed opportunities created by this decision are so far reaching and so significant they cannot be overlooked.

From 2000-2014, UAB signed 376 young men to football scholarships. 199 (53%) were from the state of Alabama and 72 (19%) were from the Birmingham metro area. Of the remaining 177 (47%) young men who signed with UAB, many now call Birmingham home.

The typical signing class at UAB during this time period was an annual average of 13 young men from the state of Alabama (about 5 of them from the Birmingham metro area) and around 12 young men from outside the state. For some, UAB was their only opportunity to continue their education as a student-athlete. For others, UAB was their only opportunity for a scholarship, an academic opportunity that many of these good kids desperately needed.

A few from this 376 went on to careers in the NFL. Most did not become professional athletes – but one thing they all had was an opportunity. An opportunity which is now lost.

*A perfect example of what UAB can mean for a young man is UAB's **J.J. Nelson** from Midfield High School. J.J. Nelson's only Division I scholarship offer was from UAB. This past season J.J. excelled at UAB, becoming a consensus First Team All American.*

J.J. Nelson on May 2nd was drafted by the Arizona Cardinals in the 5th round of the NFL Draft.

*In addition to J.J., five other UAB players from this past year's UAB team will have the opportunity to report this year to a NFL team. **Kennard Backman** was drafted by the Green Bay Packers. **Ty Long** has signed with the Washington Redskins. **Jimmy Jean** has signed with the New England Patriots. **Hunter Mullins** has been invited to a tryout with the Arizona Cardinals. **Diaheem Watkins** has been invited to a tryout with the Detroit Lions.*

We find it deeply alarming to see young men losing opportunities. For some it will prove to be the difference between having a chance to excel in college as a student-athlete, or having to get a job out of high school with little or no opportunity.

Over the years, the lack of investment in the UAB football program led many of the top athletes in the metro area and the state to pursue opportunities at universities outside of the state of Alabama. The excitement generated this season by Coach Bill Clark and his staff created a buzz among high school athletes that a reinvigorated UAB football program now had the potential for long term success.

We were all very disappointed when we learned the danger facing the football program wasn't the lack of facilities or a decent place to play – but rather an administration preparing to pull the plug just as the program was beginning to move towards its gigantic potential.

As educators we know the importance of both academics and athletics in the training of young men and women. Nowhere is this more evident than at our nation's military academies which all place a tremendous emphasis on sports as they develop our future military leaders.

Dr. Watts, we urge you to consider the impact your decision will have, indeed is already having, on young men across this state. We dedicate ourselves daily to making a difference in the lives of young men. As coaches we see first-hand how the lessons

learned playing football help develop character. We see the potential for football to shape young men into leaders.

We hope you will consider these young men as you reflect on the future of UAB. There are many young men you have the opportunity to help. UAB as a university, our community, and our state will reap lasting benefits from a UAB football program which trains and graduates fine citizens and future leaders.

We strongly urge you to move with great haste and reinstate football at UAB.

Sincerely,

- Buddy Anderson, Head Football Coach, Vestavia Hills High School
- Chris Bell, Head Football Coach, Oak Mountain High School
- Shawn Raney, Head Football Coach, Spain Park High School
- Reuben Nelson, Head Football Coach, Ramsay High School
- Bennie Hall, Head Football Coach, Center Point High School
- Ben Berguson, Head Football Coach, Homewood High School
- Dusty Goode, Athletic Director and Head Football Coach, Mortimer Jordan High School
- Tim Sanders, Head Football Coach, John Carroll High School
- Matt Plunkett, Head Football Coach, Gardendale High School
- Tom Causey, Head Football Coach, Pelham High School
- Don Jacobs, Head Football Coach, Oneonta High School
- Jason Hill, Head Football Coach, Vincent High School
- James Elgin, Head Football Coach and Director of Athletics, Pleasant Grove High School
- Fred Yancey, Head Football Coach, Briarwood Christian High School
- Chris Elmore, Head Football Coach, Chelsea High School
- Matt Glover, Head Football Coach, Pinson Valley High School
- Andre Robinson, Head Football Coach, Parker High School
- Andrew Zow, Head Football Coach, Montevallo High School
- Chris Yeager, Head Football Coach, Mountain Brook High School
- Zac Willis, Head Football Coach, Corner High School
- Mark Freeman, Head Football Coach, Thompson High School
- Watt Parker, Head Football Coach, Helena High School

- Martez Edwards, Head Football Coach and Boys/Girls Track Coach, Bessemer City High School
- Keith Etheredge, Head Football Coach, Leeds High School
- Steve Davis, Head Football Coach, Springville High School
- Todd Cassity, Head Football Coach, J B Pennington High School
- Gardner Gilliland, Head Football Coach, Cleveland High School
- Wiley McKeller, Head Football Coach, Calera High School
- Richie Busby, Head Football Coach/Athletic Director, Fultondale High School
- Ronald Cheatham, Head Football Coach, Wenonah High School
- Roderick Carson, Head Football Coach, George Washington Carver High School
- Cornelius Turner, Head Football Coach, Woodlawn High School
- Tom Hannah, Head Football Coach, Oak Grove High School
- George Bates, Head Football Coach, Minor High School
- Scott Mansell, Head Football Coach, Hueytown High School
- Keith Register, Head Football Coach, Hayden High School
- Jerry Hood, Head Football Coach, Clay-Chalkville High School
- Philip Smith, Head Football Coach, Curry High School
- Steve Martin, Head Football Coach, Ashville High School
- Tim Vakakes, Head Football Coach, P.D. Jackson-Olin High School
- Richard White, Head Football Coach, Dadeville High School
- David Powell, Head Football Coach, McAdory High School
- Woody Smothers, Head Football Coach, Carbon Hill High School
- Sam Adams, Head Football Coach, Hillcrest High School
- Chris Musso, Head Football Coach, Locust Fork High School
- Ken Adams, Head Football Coach, Susan Moore High School
- Bryan Blackmon, Head Football Coach, Opelika High School
- Lee Gibson, Head Football Coach, Tuscaloosa County High School
- Jay Brown, Head Football Coach/Athletic Director, Moody High School
- Billy Childers, Head Football Coach, Shelby County High School
- Alex Wilson, Head Football Coach, Huffman High School
- Josh Niblett, Head Football Coach, Hoover High School
- David Partridge, Head Football Coach, Shades Valley High School
- Roderick Isaac, Head Football Coach, Midfield High School
- Josh Floyd, Head Football Coach, Hewitt-Trussville High School
- Eric Johnson, Head Football Coach, Tarrant High School