

**MARK
RICH**

AP photos

BY JOHN W. KENNEDY

QUARTERBACK SNEAK

Self-assured quarterback Mark Richt had it all figured out. He would crack the University of Miami starting lineup as a freshman. In his sophomore year he would be named All-American. As a junior he would win the Heisman Trophy. Then, because he would be in such high demand, he figured he could skip his senior year and enter the NFL draft.

Yet Richt, a star high school quarterback in Boca Raton, Fla., encountered a few roadblocks along the way to superstardom. During most of his college signal-calling days he faced an obstacle named Jim Kelly. Although Richt played a few games after Kelly went down with an injury, Kelly dominated as starting QB with the Hurricanes and went on to play 11 years in the NFL before being elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

After graduating in 1982, Richt did sign a contract with the Denver Broncos as an undrafted free agent. But that same day the Broncos traded for new draft pick John Elway, who wound up staying 16 years en route to being selected the most valuable player in Super Bowl XXXIII and enshrined in the Hall of Fame.

Later Richt tried out with the Miami Dolphins, at the same time as a rookie named Dan Marino made camp — yet another future Hall of Famer.

Eventually, Richt surmised he might be wiser to try his hand at coaching.

His first-year effort at coaching high school ball proved futile. The team lost all 10 contests, being awarded a forfeit for one of the games only because an ineligible player appeared on the opposing team's roster.

In 1985, Richt had been set to sign on as a graduate assistant for the Louisiana State University football team. But the day before finalizing the decision, Florida State University Coach Bobby Bowden called and convinced Richt to join his staff, a choice that would dramatically alter Richt's life.

In 1986, FSU offensive lineman Pablo Lopez was shot and killed at a party. The following morning Bowden called a team meeting for players and staff. Although Bowden said he didn't know Lopez's eternal destiny, the coach talked frankly about heaven and hell. Bowden asked those assembled where they would spend eternity if they died that night.

For Richt, Bowden harvested what football teammate John Peasley had planted years earlier. As a new Christian, Peasley, a free safety on the Miami team, evangelized Richt when the pair shared a college dorm room. Although he saw a radical change in Peasley's lifestyle and desired

the peace his roommate had, Richt didn't make a commitment to Jesus as his Savior.

"The Holy Spirit really led me to make that decision, but I backed off," Richt recalls. In his mind he raised all sorts of objections. He worried about how other players and friends would react; he thought he would have to live a perfect life if he made a salvation decision; he inventoried his sinful ways and determined he didn't want to relinquish them all; and he had concerns that if he turned his life over to God, he would miss out on future dreams. After all, he wanted to play football, not be a missionary in a heathen village somewhere.

But then came Bowden's lecture about mortality.

"Thankfully I lived to that point in my life," Richt says. "The next day I went into Coach Bowden's office and prayed to receive Christ as my Savior."

Richt experienced forgiveness for his sins. He began to understand grace. And rather than living totally to satisfy his own desires, he began to try to please God.

At about the same time, Richt went on a blind date with his future wife, Katharyn. One of Katharyn's close friends soon led her to salvation in Jesus.

Richt went on to spend a decade as quarterbacks coach

at FSU, which included seven years as the Seminoles' offensive coordinator, orchestrating one of the most potent teams in college football history. Through that 10-year stretch, FSU never wound up with less than 10 wins.

The team claimed two national championships, five times finishing in the nation's top five in points. During Richt's tenure, six FSU quarterbacks were drafted into the NFL, including Heisman Trophy winners Chris Weinke and Charlie Ward.



Although he had turned down earlier opportunities, Richt accepted his first head-coaching job in 2001 at the University of Georgia.

Despite the pressures of coaching, Richt spends every morning in family devotions with

QUARTERBACK SNEAK

Katharyn and their sons Jonathan (16), David (12), Zack (10) and daughter Anya (9).



“We need to get the day started by focusing on what God wants,” he says.

Even when playing a Saturday night game, the Richts never fail

to attend Prince Avenue Baptist Church in Athens, Ga., on Sunday mornings.

Church plays an integral role in shaping the married couple. In fact, the Richts decided to adopt their two youngest children from a Ukrainian orphanage after learning of the need in a Sunday School class of the church they attended in Tallahassee, Fla.

For the past five years, Georgia football has incorporated a “Winning with Character” program for its players. Richt stresses the importance of preparing not only for the game on the football field but also for dealing with life after college as a husband, father and conscientious citizen. Every Thursday he spends half an hour with the seniors discussing character.

“We try to get them to focus on living as servant leaders on a daily basis,” Richt says.

“We talk about core values.” Various assistant coaches instruct freshman, sophomore and junior players.

As coach, Richt has uncovered parallels to parenting.

“Like my own children, I want our players to learn from the mistakes they make,” Richt says. “Most of those who are disciplined respond extremely well and are productive for the team and blessed in their adult lives.”

Georgia fans quickly warmed to Richt because of his family values, frankness and integrity. And while he has a calm demeanor, Richt is intensively committed to putting a winning team on the gridiron. Still, people won’t see Richt throwing his headset to the ground or yelling in the face of a referee.

Although Richt, 46, shrugs off the notion that he is successful,

career statistics tell a different story. He signed an eight-year contract extension last July after compiling a 52-13 record in his first five seasons leading the Bulldogs. Georgia has won two Southeastern Conference championships with Richt at the helm.

He even had his picture on a box of Wheaties at the beginning of the 2006 season, “It’s not a tribute to me, it’s a tribute to Georgia,” Richt says. “I didn’t realize they were going to put my mug on there.”

Richt also had his face on the motion picture screen in the fall with a small role in *Facing the Giants*, a movie about a Georgia high school football coach’s improbable dream season. After he watched *Flywheel*, an earlier

film produced and written by Alex and Stephen Kendrick, Richt agreed to portray a devout Christian football coach who had mentored the high school coach. The Kendrick brothers also are associate pastors at Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Ga. — and rabid Bulldog fans.

A busy 2006 also brought a health scare to the family. Katharyn underwent surgery in April after doctors diagnosed her with cervical cancer. Because of early detection the cancer hadn’t spread, and Katharyn appears to be fully recovered. She is the Bulldogs’ “water girl” at away games. Middle son David is water boy at home games.

Oldest son Jon is quarterback for his high school football team. Although only a junior,

he already has been offered a scholarship by Clemson University and likely will have further proposals from which to choose this year.

The 2006 season marked the first time in five years Georgia didn’t win at least 10 games and finish in the top 10 in the final Associated Press poll. Although Richt is naturally disappointed, he isn’t consumed with winning at all costs.

“At the end I hope I will be remembered as someone who loved the Lord and served Him,” Richt says. “After that, it doesn’t really matter.” **tpe**

JOHN W. KENNEDY is news editor of *Today’s Pentecostal Evangel*.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

“There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:10,23
(See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God’s forgiveness and repent of your sins.

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)

B. Believe in Jesus (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

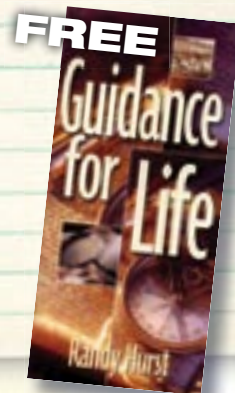
“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

If you would like someone to pray with you concerning your decision to follow Jesus Christ, please contact the church indicated on the back cover or call:

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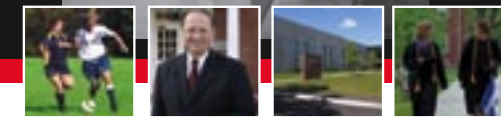
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