



BAHAMAS COACH MIKE BASS

In 1979, having retired from nearly 10 years in the NFL, I moved to The Bahamas. I relocated to Freeport on the island of Grand Bahama. It had always been my dream to live in a Caribbean atmosphere and I had fallen in love with Freeport for a number of reasons.

In years past, I had trained in Freeport in preparation for the opening of Washington Redskins training camps. The weather, the sea, the sand, and especially the people were welcoming and encouraging. For the first time in my life, I was not a minority. Instead, many of the bankers, lawyers, doctors, general workers, taxi drivers, police officers, etc. looked like me. They were people of color and, though new to me, this was a very invigorating experience to finally not be the only “minority in the room” as had been the case so many times in my life.

In response to this welcoming atmosphere, I felt I wanted to contribute to the Grand Bahama community. After a few weeks of getting settled in, I was asked by Sharky Martin, a popular athlete on Grand Bahama, if I would be interested in coaching a nearby football team, the 8-Mile Rock Crushers. 8-Mile Rock was a settlement approximately 8 miles outside of Freeport. I had never considered coaching, but I felt this was an opportunity to make that contribution I was seeking, teach American football, and, at the same time, satisfy my own competitive spirit as an athlete.

With the Crushers, we went on to win several Bahamas American Football League (BAFL) championships, beating, quite handily, other football teams both in Freeport and Nassau. To begin, I established team discipline, which was patterned after my first NFL coach, Vince Lombardi. Players were held accountable for knowing their assignments, practicing, and respecting both their opponents and teammates. These rules and regulations included a “no practice, no play” philosophy, which was very unpopular with several of the older established players on the team. Practice was important to minimize injuries from being in poor condition and/or making assignment mistakes. In winning games and BAFL championships, the team, and especially a lot of the younger players, who were gaining valuable experience, accepted my rules and regulations, came to practice every day, and developed into exceptional players.

Unfortunately, just before the final BAFL championship game that I coached with the Crushers, I announced that players, who had not practiced during the week, would be relegated to the bench. I intended to enforce my “no practice, no play” rule. This resulted in the older players bullying the younger players into participating in the action to remove me as Coach. To this day, I believe this action was a fear by the older players that the young players would play well enough to win another BAFL championship without them and deprive the older players of the recognition and bragging rights that come with winning another BAFL championship.

Still, I was proud of the positive effect I had on many of the younger players on the team. If not for my “no practice, no play” doctrine, many of those younger players would never have gotten the opportunity to play and show their own skills. In my own opinion, I feel I brought organized American football to a higher level in The Bahamas with my emphasis on discipline and teaching the intricacies of American football. To my satisfaction, two of my players, Sinclair Knowles and Joey Wildgoose, a receiver and tight end respectively, earned scholarships to U.S. colleges.

I was not discouraged by leaving the “Crushers” and was even more enthusiastic about teaching American football to a willing set of young athletes, who wanted to learn. Consequently, I formed a football team in Freeport proper, the Guinness Titans. Many of the Crushers players, who lived in Freeport, joined the Titans in support of me and, also, found it beneficial to not have to travel those 8 miles to 8-Mile Rock every day for practice.

Using the same system that I had installed with the Crushers, and based on what I considered the professional approach to football, the Titans improved each game we played. I concentrated on teaching individual fundamental, individual discipline, conditioning, knowing position assignments, and elimination of mental mistakes. In our second year of existence, the Titans won the BAFL championship in Nassau over a team that had defeated us earlier in the season. I think this game demonstrated that my overall philosophy of teaching American football was the correct approach.

With the success of the Titans, I was given the most satisfying coaching experience of my short-lived coaching career. I had taken a set of boys and turned them into men and indoctrinated them with life-changing philosophies that, I am told, have been the cornerstones of their lives to this day. Some of these men with the Titans included James Kemp, an offensive tackle who was like a son to me (went to Bethune Cookman University), Craig Simms, a championship quarterback who had never ever played quarterback, Stanford Duhaney (a team leader), Keith Knowles (now a manager at Freeport Power & younger brother of Sinclair), Franklyn “Pilli” Thomas (now a Nassau banker), Sammy Davis, (my “coach on the field), Peter Curry (commanded respect by his mere presence), Angelo Capron (my second “son”), “Grumps” Basden (great athlete), and many more who appear in the photos on my personal website.

With the Crushers, I had many great players as well, who included Martin, Wildgoose, Pat Grant, Phil Grant, Phil Hepburn, Rex Russell, Kevin Grant, Kenny Martin, Knowles, McArthur Rigby, Jessup Johnson, Tom Martin, John Hanna, Ben Beneby, Cess Grant, and many more that contributed to the success of the Crushers.

In 1997, after 18 years as a resident in Freeport, I returned to the U.S. and settled in Gainesville, Florida, where I reside today. In 2023, I returned to Freeport to receive an honor from my players for my contributions to American Football on Grand Bahama. I would hope that I made

a difference in the lives of the young men I coached. Some of those photos are on my website page as well. This honor was one of the highlights of my life, which I equate to my induction in the Redskins/Commanders Ring of Fame. I was both surprised and humbled that my former players held me in such high esteem. These players, who were very young men (some were boys) many years ago now know the real meaning of being a man through their participation in football.

We had fun at the banquet as my players related many “Coach Mike Bass” stories that caused a lot of laughter and even some groans in remembrance of those 18 years I lived in Freeport. All of this brought back great memories that always leads me to say and believe that “the only thing about me that is not Bahamian is my accent”.

I am so thankful for the time I spent in Freeport. In those 18 years, I got as much as I gave. My players taught me so much and I look forward to annual visits back to Freeport in appreciation for the many who were a part of my life at that time. I truly believe; “It’s Better In The Bahamas”.