

## “Student Affairs Talk” • Rusty Guill, Special Assistant to the Vice President • Feb. 26, 2020

**Q: Thank you for joining me this week on the podcast, Rusty. Your ties to Clemson run very deep; what are your first recollections of the university?**

Guill: My first recollections were probably in 1976. I had no intentions of coming to Clemson as a student. But a person who was a student here at the time invited me up. I didn't even know where Clemson was in the state of South Carolina. My parents did not go to college, so there was no connection there at all. I grew up in North Augusta, South Carolina. My first recollection was driving near campus and seeing Tiger paws on the road. I don't know why, but it spoke volumes to me that there was something different about this place. Something about it was different than any place I'd ever seen. That literally was my first memory and thoughts of Clemson.

**Q: You came during a time the football program was going to be on the rise. Its national profile had gone up to where it culminated with the 1981 National Championship and a young head coach named Danny Ford. Clemson was always sort of tucked away in the Northwest corner of South Carolina. A lot of folks didn't know about it, outside of our state's borders. Do you ever think back in amazement of where Clemson is today versus your recollection in 1976? It seems almost unfathomable today that someone only a couple of hours down the road wouldn't have known much about Clemson.**

Guill: Charley Pell was actually the football coach when I came to school, before Danny took over. But you're right. Clemson football, prior to that, had been down. Then it just took off. It's been amazing. I can't tell you this is what I would've seen happening at Clemson back in the 1970s. I'm no prouder of it now than I was then. I'm so proud to be a Clemson Tiger, whether we won three ball games or a National Championship. I love this place and I'm so happy we found success and that more people know about this place. A lot has changed, and I've seen it change from football to the campus itself to the growth of the university.

**Q: You graduated in 1980 with a degree in business. What do you remember the most thinking back to your days as a college student?**

Guill: I remember going to classes, of course. But I was fortunate to get a job in the athletic department, and that meant the world to me. I would look forward to working there every day. I enjoyed my classes and did okay, but I can't say I got up every morning looking forward going to class. But I looked forward going to work every day. It was critical that I worked, because we did not have a lot of money. My daddy told me I had to get a job. That job with the athletic department really got me off to a great start at Clemson. It helped me meet people and it felt like I was involved. I enjoyed my classes and was very committed to doing a good job in them. But I have to say I remember a lot more of life outside the classroom. Getting my degree was very important and really opened the door for me for a lot of things. I'm very grateful for my Clemson degree and for my professors and had a really great time here.

**Q: After graduating, you spent some time away from Clemson. You returned and got an MBA; is that what led to your first full-time job here? Take me through that career progression.**

Guill: I graduated in May of '80 and then I went to Charlotte, North Carolina. My first job was as a sales representative for a chemical company. Believe it or not, my job was demonstrating how my product could clean a toilet better than my competitors. So, I cleaned toilets and hoped and prayed they came clean (laughs). I buffed and waxed and stripped floors. Companies loved to come see me, because I would do all their stripping and waxing floors for free. Knowing they weren't going to buy my product. I would be there at night working as hard as I could and I'm sure they were laughing, just watching me buff and shine their floors, all while knowing they were getting a free job. I was not a good salesperson, to be honest with you. But I guess maybe they thought I was worth trying to salvage. I was there from May of '80 through December that year. Then the company decided, 'Maybe we can get

some better use out of him.' So, they made me the production manager. I moved to Atlanta, Georgia in January of '81 and I was there the entire year as the production manager for this chemical company. I knew I was wanting to come back and get my master's, but I wanted to save some money. After that year and a half, from sales rep to production manager, I came back in January of '82 and began my master's program. I became a GA in the athletic department. I had completed one semester only of my master's degree and was very happy. I had made it known that I wanted to go into athletic administration. They said, "In order to do that, you've got to go somewhere and earn your way back here." I was good with that, because I thought that I had two years to work on my master's and I would worry about that then. After my first semester, it was the summer of '82. They came to me and said, "Rusty, we have an opportunity you can't turn down." I was hoping it meant they were going to offer me a job in the Clemson athletic department. But it wasn't. It was to be the associate athletic director at Middle Tennessee State University. So, I left in the summer of '82 and was associate AD at MTSU for a couple of years. I had a good time up there, but it wasn't for me. So, I moved back to Atlanta where I was a marketing representative for a company for four years. I actually came back to Clemson in January of '88 and went to school that entire year and graduated with my MBA in December.

**Q: And that's what led to your first full-time role in Student Affairs?**

Guill: Well, actually, what happened was I graduated with my master's and the door did not open for me to come back to Clemson at that point. I moved to Hilton Head and became an accounting manager for a hotel. I was waiting on that phone call from Clemson and finally it came in September of '89.

**Q: Nick Lomax was vice president for Student Affairs at the time, and then of course you worked alongside Almeda Jacks for a number of years. You were budget and personnel director; tell me about that experience and what it was like?**

Guill: I learned an awful lot about number

## “Student Affairs Talk” • Rusty Guill, Special Assistant to the Vice President • Feb. 26, 2020

crunching and putting together budgets. But the best part of that job was getting to know almost everyone in the division. It wasn't nearly as big as it is now. I'd get to see people when they would do their budget, or when they were first hired. I really loved it, because I felt like I knew everyone and what was going on in every department. While number crunching and paperwork wasn't necessarily my first love, I loved it because it really allowed me to get a good grasp on what all we did in Student Affairs. But more importantly, I got to know almost everyone who worked in the entire division.

**Q: At what point was it in your career that you made a more intentional shift toward really pouring into students and mentoring opportunities? Was that your first tenure as special assistant?**

Guill: I really need to go back to my childhood, to tell you where it came from. When I was seven years old, I was in a car accident and my right arm was cut off. They didn't want to put my arm back on, but they did. There was not any hope that I would be able to use the arm; it would be a dead arm. The doctor said, “There's no way this can happen.” But it did. They put my arm back on. Growing up, it was very tough because I was not able to do anything physically. I was the kid nobody wanted to be. Everybody made fun of me; I was very handicapped and deformed looking. I had to go to rehab in Aiken, South Carolina every day for years. I kind of got labeled as someone who wasn't going to be very successful in life. When I came to Clemson, I had a tough time. I was never able to play sports. I didn't do things normal kids had been able to do. So, I got a job working in the athletic department. There were some wonderful mentors that took an interest in me. When I told them my story about my arm being cut off and how the experience of growing up was very difficult, they took a wonderful interest in me as my mentor. They encouraged me, believed in me. It made all the difference in my world. My goal, while I was at Clemson, was to come back and give back to the university. Really, Clemson gave me my life back. I realized the importance of mentors and how they

had changed my life. From the time I knew I was going to graduate from Clemson, my goal was to come back and give back to the university. I could never repay the debt I owed this place. But I also wanted to be very intentional about working with students, getting to know them and letting them know I believed in them. It meant so much to me. Almeda (Jacks) knew of my story and was gracious enough to allow me the opportunity to work with students. So, that's how it started. I knew what it was like, at times, to feel bad. I wanted every Clemson student to have the great experience that I had here.

**Q: At some point in your career progression, you had an associate dean of students title. That may have been during the time after Almeda left for New York to do some consulting. Was that a different position for you?**

Guill: It was, and it wasn't different. Working with students was nothing new. But now it was dealing with students who were having some serious concerns. It's one thing to be a mentor, believe in someone and encourage them. But it's another thing when students are going through a difficult time. It was the point where we weren't trying to make them happy at Clemson, but rather trying to find their place in life. It was the same, in terms of working with students. But the conditions were very different.

**Q: You've coordinated efforts with our Student Advisory Board for a number of years. You've also had great relationships built with our donors as well. Why are those types of things important in Student Affairs?**

Guill: It's so important that people understand — students, parents and everyone — what we do in Student Affairs. I think a lot of people don't understand not only what we do, but also the importance of what we do. I think it's very important we get that message out of why it's important for people to give money, so that we can provide services for our students so they can have a great experience. To me, seeing and hearing from students is the best way to let them know what we do and what their gift can do for a student at Clemson.

I do think that relationships are still the absolute best form of communication, and letting people know that they're appreciated. It can make a difference.

**Q: You're a guy who has won many honors over the years. I'm going to read off a list and I want to get your reaction on what these types of things have meant to you. From Clemson student government, the Order of the Tiger award. Clemson Friend to the Greeks. Twice you've been Blue Key National Advisor of the Year. You've been the recipient of SACSA's Joe Buck Service Award. Phi Kappa Tau National Advisor of the Year. When I read those things off to you, what comes to your mind and why do you think you were on the receiving end of those accolades?**

Guill: The thing that comes to my mind first is how blessed and fortunate I am. The awards that mean the most to me are the ones the students gave to me. It lets me know that maybe I impacted their lives in a positive way and that they appreciated it. But I've been very fortunate to have been put in a position by Clemson where I could work with students. That's allowed some of these honors to come my way. But the honor of working with students is the greatest. When students recognize you, it's better than a bonus paycheck.

**Q: For the past several years you've had a hand in planning Clemson's involvement in community service at bowl games and National Championship Game appearances. What led to your inclusion on those projects, and what has that work meant to you?**

Guill: One of my first jobs at Clemson was as coordinator of special events. That meant I coordinated bowl trips for Clemson on behalf of Student Affairs. Plus, I had worked in the athletic department here and been associate AD at Middle Tennessee. I had a good foundation of those types of things and experience in preparing. We felt it was very important when Clemson would go to a bowl or playoff game to give back to that community. That's what we preach here at Clemson; the value of giving back through community service. We only felt it was natural that when we would go somewhere that we would give back to that

## “Student Affairs Talk” • Rusty Guill, Special Assistant to the Vice President • Feb. 26, 2020

city. And also, it was a way to involve and connect with our alumni in those various cities. It's what Clemson is all about; serving others. I had some experience and knew a little about doing that. Honestly, I also asked if this was something I could do for Clemson.

**Q: Another thing you've been really good at over the years is that as other areas host Tigertown Bound receptions and send students to Clemson. What's it been like to make those connections right off the bat, before they even begin their experience here at Clemson?**

Guill: I'm probably more excited than they are. Because I know what's in store for them at Clemson. I'm really going just to answer questions and also share with them what it's like to be part of the Clemson Family. I share my own experience of how Clemson changed my life. We want them to realize right off the bat the Clemson Family is real. There's someone here who will reach out to them, be their friend and mentor and be someone they can go to with questions. I love doing it and meeting with prospective students. They can tell I really love this place.

**Q: One of the neat things I've had an opportunity to take part in since assuming this role back in 2017 took place in the fall of 2018. Some students, current and former, had gathered along with your wife Melanie to surprise you with a celebration in your honor. You were presented a new Clemson ring. What do you remember most about that event and how much did it mean to you personally to see that many folks gathered to surprise you?**

Guill: I had been told we were going to view a place that was opening. Being that I work a lot with students, they wanted me to come to be able to recommend it for weddings or student gatherings. I was told that's why I was coming to view the property and meet with people. But when we drove up, I realized I knew everyone that was standing there. I asked my wife, "What's going on?" She said she had no idea, and told me to get out and ask. So I got out and asked what was going on. I saw Almeda as one of the first ones, and I thought it was a surprise retirement party

for me. I thought it was a nice way to say goodbye and send me out in style. Then, they assured me it wasn't. I kept asking, "What are we celebrating?" I'm not retiring. I'm not dying. I haven't done anything significant. I still don't understand it to this day. You saw my reaction; I can't put into words what it meant. It was kind of like being at your funeral, but you're still living. You hear all the nice things that people are saying about you. Like I said before, the greatest gift is that it was all organized by students. Past and current. I can't describe what it meant to me, but it helped me understand that I've had some impact on Clemson students and their experience, which is all I ever wanted to do in my career. It meant the world to me. I was completely caught off-guard. I had a long time getting myself composed. It was probably the nicest thing anyone has ever done for me, or ever will.

**Q: It's hard to tell your complete story without mentioning one of your key involvement areas. For years, you've actually served as a member of the scoring committee at The Masters. One of pro golf's major tournaments, right down the road in Augusta, Georgia. Right across the river from where you grew up. I've always wanted to know; how did you end up in that role?**

Guill: My dad grew up in Augusta. And he started working there as a freshman in high school. When I was old enough to start going, my dad started taking me. This year, in April 2020, it will be my 56th consecutive Masters and my 26th year working as the official scorer. My dad worked at The Masters for 50 years and when he retired, he asked if I could take his position. My dad knew a lot of the people because he'd been there for so long. They knew my story growing up. When my arm accident happened, my parents were at The Masters tournament. So they all knew who I was. They were kind enough to let my dad pass the job on to me.

**Q: So, what's the role as the official scorer? Are you in the scoring tent collecting scorecards when a player finishes his round?**

Guill: No, I'm actually in a control center where we get the scorecard and we check

it to make sure it's correct. We make sure what the golfer put down on his scorecard matches up with what the official scorer for each hole has. In addition to that, I'm also in charge of putting up a sign if play is suspended. Or changing the leaderboard; I'm kind of a dispatcher for that. I've been very fortunate and very blessed to be able to do that.

**Q: It kind of plays off your connection to athletics. Who were some of those influential figures that brought you along and showed you the way?**

Guill: The most inspirational mentor, to me, was Arnold Palmer. He was someone who's had a tremendous effect on me. I was very fortunate to get to know him personally through my work with The Masters. He was kind of like my mentor. He had three grandchildren that came to Clemson, including one that played golf here. My wife and I sort of adopted all three of them. A lot of how I try and work with our students is the result of the influence of Arnold Palmer. I've had so many mentors. But if you're talking Clemson Athletics, Bob Bradley was the best of the best. I can still see him clearly now, bringing doughnuts in on Friday and working from his typewriter. Always supporting to me. Tim Bourret was a wonderful person, we actually lived together at one point. Tim was a huge influence on me. I worked with Bill McLellan, Bobby Robinson, Terry Don Phillips and Dan Radakovich as athletic directors. I go way back. Joe Turner, director of IPTAY at the time when I was a grad assistant, was instrumental in me getting the job at Middle Tennessee State. Chuck Kriese, the men's tennis coach for a long time, did some incredibly nice things for me and I'll never forget that. Dabo Swinney, of course, is someone I know well. I'm amazed at the way he does things. He just shows that you can do things the right way and be ultra-successful. That's been a big influence on me. Not only me personally, but also the entire country. You can do things the right way and win. And that's refreshing. From a distance, he's had a real example on me with the type of program he's run.

## **“Student Affairs Talk” • Rusty Guill, Special Assisat to the Vice President • Feb. 26, 2020**

**Q: What about from the Student Affairs perspective? Certainly you spent a lot of time with Almeda Jacks, who just retired last October. And the interim vice president Chris Miller, you actually shared a suite with him for a bit in the Hendrix Center where we’re recording this podcast. They’ve had to be influential figures in your work life?**

Guill: It goes back to Nick Lomax; he was a huge influence on me. Almeda, I probably worked for her 20-plus years. I can never say I had one disagreement or lost any respect for her. SI would call her the greatest boss anyone could ever have. She gave me opportunities I never dreamed that I would have. I can’t thank her enough. Chris Miller has been fantastic. And the thing I’ve noticed about him is his passion for students. He’s here for them, puts them first. Some of us old-time Clemson people say, “He gets it.” He understands the student experience at Clemson and he’s been great.

**Q: Family is obviously very important to you. Your wife, Melanie, is a first-grade teacher in the area and your two kids have grown up in the shadows of Death Valley. What sort of things do you enjoy as a family or what recollections do you have indoctrinating them in the Clemson Experience?**

Guill: My kids grew up here and thought they had lots of brothers and sisters, because there were lots of Clemson students at our house for meals and stuff like that. When our kids would have birthday parties, a lot of Clemson athletes would come. Cheerleaders. The Tiger. My children didn’t think that much about it, because they were used to it. My kids grew up with a charmed life, taking it all for granted like it wasn’t a big deal. They were very used to them coming over. I can remember a student coming to my house when our son, Carson, was just three years old. They’d pick him up and take him to the baseball game to try and pick up girls. He was a cute little fella. My son would go out with college students and things like that. We knew the students well and trusted them. That’s the kind of environment they grew up in. They had lots of big brothers and sisters and were used to

students being at our house, skiing or going out on the boat with us, taking the kids to ball games. Taking my daughter to beauty pageants. It was a great life for my kids; the students were very gracious to them.