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Chuck DeVleigher

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Chuck DeVleigher had a cup of coffee career with the Buffalo Bills, playing in four games during the 1969 season. He finished that season playing minor league professional football in Hartford, Connecticut for the Hartford Knights in the Atlantic Coast Football League, losing in the ACFL Championship game.



Photo Credit, Robert L. Smith

Charles DeVleigher was born on January 2, 1947 in Paterson, New Jersey to Charles and Gladys (Zimmerman) DeVleigher. He grew up in Paterson with his younger brother Wayne. DeVleigher attended East Paterson High School where he was an All-State football player as a senior. He was also named to the Paterson, New Jersey, All-Grid first team in 1963 at offensive tackle. He played both lines for the team and started on the varsity as both a junior and senior.

East Paterson high school head coach Ken Karl in 1963 that DeVleigher was “the most improved lineman on the team.”ⁱ He also said he was equally effective on defense. After an especially outstanding game when DeVleigher was named by *The News* as the lineman of the week, Coach Karl said, “When we play a four-man line the outside tackle has a great deal of responsibility. ... He has done a tremendous job. DeVleigher is the type of boy who wants to play football and works at it. During the winter he worked at isometrics to improve his agility.”ⁱⁱ DeVleigher at 6-foot 5-inches and 215-pounds was a



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big boy during his high school playing days and his strength and agility made him almost impossible to be blocked by opposing offensive linemen. He helped lead the East Paterson Crusaders to extremely successful 8-1 seasons, both as a junior and senior. In 1963, the Crusaders scored 261 points, the most of any team in the area.

DeVleigher received a scholarship offer from Memphis State and was excited to continue his football career at the school. He had a standout season for the Tigers freshman team in 1964.

During spring practice in 1965 head coach Billy Murphy told the media, “We think Chuck is going to make a fine football player. Like all sophomores he has much to learn, but we consider him an incredibly good varsity prospect.”ⁱⁱⁱ

He made an almost immediate impact on the Memphis State football club. After losing their first three games of the 1965 season, including a 34-14 pasting by Mississippi, the Tigers stunned tenth ranked Mississippi State 33-13 on October 16. DeVleigher began playing more and Memphis State coincidentally went on a winning streak. Henry Schwartz of the *Paterson News* said about Chuck’s impact, “He has earned praise for his brilliant play and in helping the southern school win its last five games.”^{iv} The Tigers ended 1965 with a 5-5 record but both the team and DeVleigher were poised for brighter days ahead.

DeVleigher was a fixture at defensive tackle as a junior, helping to anchor a defense that allowed only 96 points as Memphis State finished with a stellar 7-2 record. The only blemishes on their record were an opening day loss to Mississippi 13-0 and to Wake Forest 21-7. DeVleigher started the season with an outstanding game in their loss to Mississippi and played well throughout the season. He contributed to many outstanding defensive team performances as the Tigers won two games by shutout, and two others when only allowing a single touchdown.

DeVleigher served in the Army at Fort Leonard, Missouri with a reserve unit between his junior and senior years. Coach Murphy attempted to secure three-day weekend passes for DeVleigher in September 1967 so that he could practice with the team on Friday and Saturday in preparing for the opening game with Mississippi on September 23.

Memphis State’s games with Mississippi were known as ‘holy wars,’ however the Tigers had never beaten the Rebels going into their 1967 opening day encounter. Their overall record against Mississippi was 0-20-1, a lone 0-0 tie in 1963. In their three previous games, Memphis State had been outscored by the Rebels 77-14.



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In front of the largest crowd in Memorial Stadium history, 50,414 on September 23, the Tigers turned a 17-14 fourth quarter deficit into a stunning 27-17 upset victory over Mississippi. The Tigers defense bottled up Mississippi's offense throughout the game, only allowing one offensive touchdown.

Memphis State won four of their next five games and stood at 5-1 when they played Florida State in the Tigers homecoming game that was also televised by ABC on November 4. DeVleigher had been playing extremely well, even being nominated for the Missouri Valley Conference Player of the week after an especially impactful game in a 17-0 win over Cincinnati. He was ready for another big game against the Seminoles.

Florida State physically beat up Memphis State, and the Tigers lost two of its best defensive players during the game including DeVleigher in their 26-7 loss. DeVleigher underwent knee surgery and missed the teams' final two games of the season at Houston and vs North Texas State. Memphis State split those two games and ended DeVleigher's senior season with a 6-3 record.

DeVleigher was drafted by the Buffalo Bills in the 1968 NFL draft on January 31, 1968. He was selected in the 14th round, pick #361. He definitely wanted to give pro football a try, even though he was recovering from knee surgery. DeVleigher signed a contract with Buffalo on April 18. He graduated from Memphis State in the spring of 1968 with a degree in Education.

When DeVleigher was drafted by the Bills he had filled out his 6-foot, 5-inch frame to 265 pounds. The Bills 1968 media guide said of him, "Has strength and agility to develop into a good pro."^v He was scouted and uncovered for the Bills by Carl Voyles, the head football coach at Fort Myers (FL) high school, and a Bills part-time scout. He liked DeVleigher's combination of size and quickness for a defensive lineman.

DeVleigher reported to the Bills training camp in July and participated in all the team's drills preparing for the preseason games. While in camp, DeVleigher's father, Charles died on July 26 of heart failure. His Dad, a Navy veteran of World War II, died at the young age of 50. Chuck missed a couple of days of camp but was back in time for the Bills preseason opener. DeVleigher played in the Bills first two preseason contests, August 5, a 13-9 win over Detroit, and on August 11, a 28-28 tie against Miami in Rochester, N.Y. His knee was not fully recovered from surgery, so the Bills shut him down after the Dolphins game, ending his 1968 season.

He re-signed with the Bills on June 30, 1969, ready to give pro football another shot with a healthy knee. He was back at training camp in July and played in four of the Bills' six preseason games, acquitting himself well. The Bills liked his versatility and his ability to



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play any of the defensive line positions as well as contribute on special teams. One of the highlights of the Bills 1969 preseason was the arrival of, #1 draft pick, superstar O.J. Simpson. O.J. made his preseason debut on August 15 in a 24-12 loss to the Detroit Lions. DeVleigher also participated in that game.

DeVleigher made the Bills' roster out of training camp as a backup defensive end to starter Ron McDole and a special teamer. The Bills opening game on September 14 featured two of the greatest players in NFL history. It was O.J. Simpson's first regular season game, and it was Jets quarterback Joe Namath's first game since winning Super Bowl III. There was great anticipation for the opening day contest. In front of a War Memorial Stadium capacity crowd of 46,165, O.J. scored his first career touchdown on an 8-yard run, but the defending Super Bowl champion Jets were too much for the Bills. The Jets scored two fourth quarter touchdowns, breaking a 19-19 deadlock, winning the game 33-19. It was an exciting game for DeVleigher to make his pro football debut.

DeVleigher played in the Bills' next three games, primarily on special teams and spelling McDole at left defensive end, when necessary. The Bills started the season with one-win in those first four games. They defeated the Denver Broncos 41-28 on September 28 for that lone win.

DeVleigher was waived by head coach John Rauch following a 28-14 loss to Houston and he cleared waivers on October 10. Once he cleared waivers, the Bills assigned him to their minor league affiliate in Hartford. He was replaced on the Bills roster by Julian Nunamaker.

The Hartford Knights, of the ACFL, welcomed DeVleigher as the Hartford Courant promoted his arrival, "The Knights made a king-size transaction with the Buffalo Bills earlier in the week when it was announced that 6-4, 270-pound defensive tackle Chuck DeVleigher would be sent to Hartford. DeVleigher was used primarily on the special teams and Bills' head coach John Rauch feels it will be beneficial to the big lineman to get game action."^{vi}

He made his debut with the Knights on October 19 in a 33-3 win over Roanoke. He started at right defensive tackle in the final six regular season games for the Knights as they finished with a 10-2 record, winning the ACFL Northern Division.

The Knights were defeated by the Pottstown Firebirds in the ACFL Championship game at Dillon Stadium, 20-0. It was DeVleigher's last professional football game. He felt his knee was still not quite right and called it a career.



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DeVleigher following his football career has resided for many years in Glendale, Arizona. His mother Gladys died, May 5, 2000.

End Notes:

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- ⁱ Neuman, Rudy & Curley, Bob, "63 Dream Team More Than Just a Passing Fancy," *The News* (Paterson, NJ), December 5, 1963, p37
 - ⁱⁱ Staff, "Alanzo Jennings, DeVleigher Reap News' Grid Laurels," *The News* (Paterson, NJ), October 23, 1963, p37
 - ⁱⁱⁱ Staff, "Chuck DeVleigher at Memphis State," *The Morning Call* (Paterson, NJ), April 16, 1965, p18
 - ^{iv} Schwartz, Henry C., "The Sports Cauldron," Paterson News, November 16, 1965, p28
 - ^v Buffalo Bills 1968 Media Guide, Buffalo Bills, Inc., p39
 - ^{vi} Staff, "Knights Set to Face Buckskins," *Hartford Courant*, October 17, 1969, p33