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A Season to Remember


Furman University

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COACH JOHN ROBERTS, normally reserved, could not contain his enthusiasm after the Paladins handed the University of Minnesota – Duluth their first loss in four years, to advance to the national championship game.

A Season to Remember

Furman advances to national championship game.

FROM STAFF REPORTS

The Furman men's rugby team climbed back into the national limelight this fall, advancing to USA Rugby's Division 2 National Championship Game Dec. 4.

The Paladins were the toast of the small college rugby world a decade ago. Playing in Division 3, Furman teams racked up three national championships in 2003, 2004 and 2005.



PATRICK MUSAU '17, an eight-man from Kenya, serves as the Furman captain.

**THE BOYS IN PURPLE
CLOSED THE SEASON
WITH A 13-1 RECORD,
THE BEST RUN SINCE
2004-05.**

The Paladins finished runner-up in 2007 and 2008. In 2010, Furman moved up to Division 2 but was a minnow in a bass pond. Of the 124 D2 programs, only Middlebury College has a smaller enrollment than Furman.

Since that time, the Paladins have elbowed their way to the top. The team finished ranked sixth in 2014 and narrowly missed the playoffs in 2015. On the road to the 2016 championship game, the Paladins captured the Southern Rugby Conference Title and defeated Sacred Heart University 68-31 and North Carolina State 41-19 to win USA Rugby's South Regional.

Those victories set up a dream scenario for the Paladins. Furman, which hosted the Division 2 Final Four 2013-15, was selected this past August to host the event once more. The Paladins would have home field advantage.

In the semifinals, Furman faced a daunting task. The Paladins had to take on three-time defending champion Minnesota-Duluth. The last time the Penguins were on the losing end of a match was spring 2013. When junior Matty Newman slotted a 50-meter drop kick in the opening two minutes of play to put the Dins up 3-0, the wildly partisan crowd was euphoric.

Duluth fought back and constructed a 12-3 lead late in the first half before Furman's Adam Miller, Jeffrey Rein and Newman each scored a try to construct a 29-12 lead. But Duluth would not go away. The Penguins nibbled away at the Paladin lead. With 12 minutes remaining, Furman clung to a 32-29 lead.

In the final moments, Duluth pressed. But the Paladins' defense held.

The next day, Furman played three-year runner-up University of Wisconsin-

Notes from the Field



THOMAS TRANKLE, a sophomore from Pretoria, South Africa, surges ahead against Whitewater.

sin-Whitewater. The wet, cold conditions did not suit Furman's fast-paced offense. During the first half, both teams slugged their way to a 7-3 score with Whitewater holding a slim edge.

Near the game's midway mark, the Warhawks found the try zone twice, but Furman continued to fight and sliced Whitewater's lead to 22-13 when Furman prop Jeff Tonge bullied in a try from the one-meter line with 15 minutes remaining. With the Furman fans screaming, the Paladins pressed and nearly scored twice. But the physicality of a close win the day before was taking its toll when a Whitewater flanker nabbed a bobbled ball and raced to the try zone with four minutes remaining to seal the victory 29-13.

The boys in purple closed the season with a 13-1 record, the best run since 2004-05, when the program notched 21 consecutive wins. The team is coached by John Roberts, who cofounded the team with **Marc Roberts '99** (no relation). Now coaching his 19th year, Roberts has amassed a record of 178-61-2.

It was not the only fall accomplishment for the program. In October, the team announced that it had formed a Furman Rugby Alumni Board. The eight-member board, headed by **Trent Emeneker '02** and **Chris Helps '01**, will work to deepen connections with rugby alumni, mentor current players, help recruit student athletes and raise funds for the program. ●