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## Notes from the Field

Furman University

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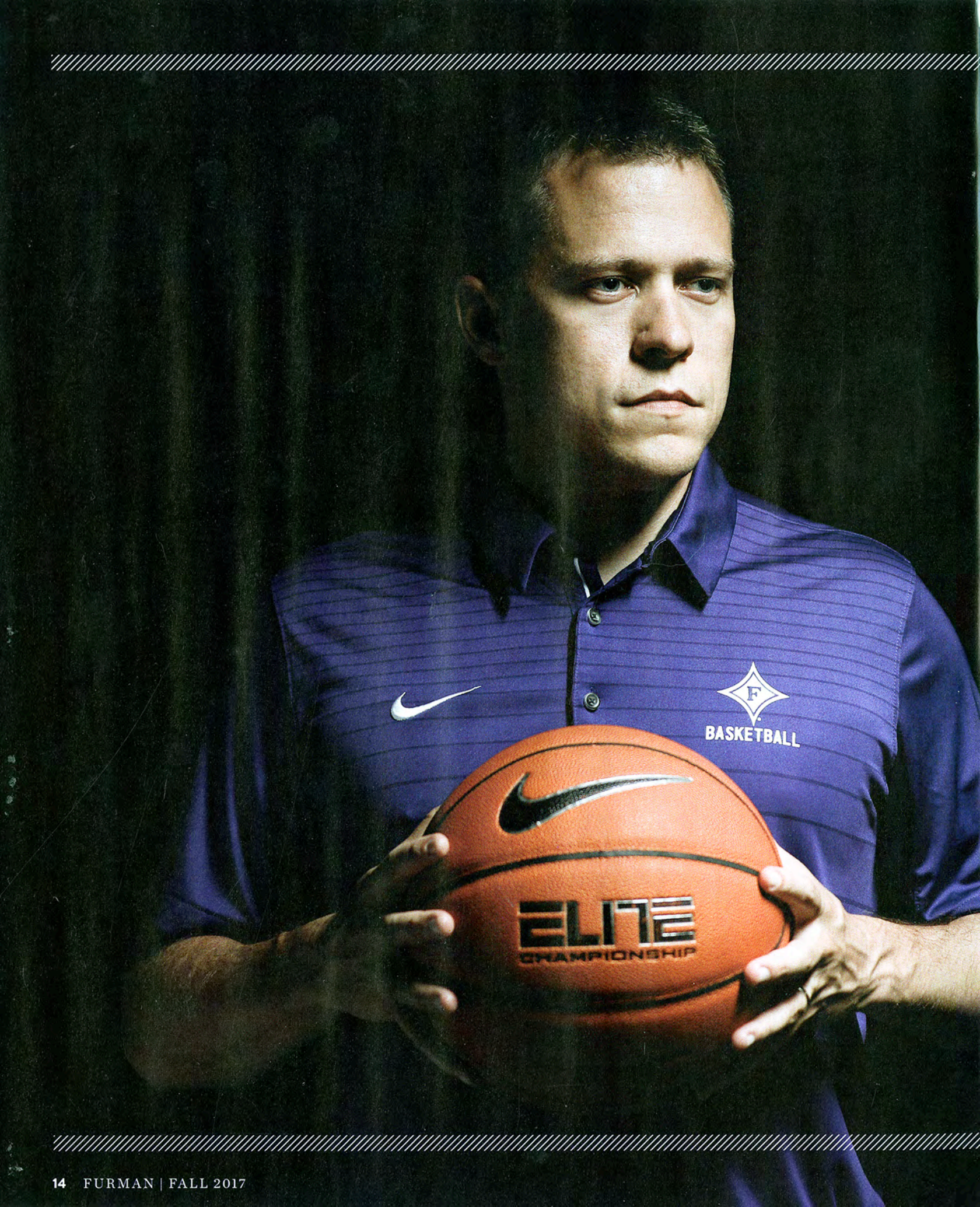
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# NOTES FROM THE FIELD

## Building a Great Program

*Richey played a key role in Furman's  
basketball success, now he gets to lead it.*

BY VINCE MOORE

**T**hings were not looking good for the Furman basketball program after the 2012-13 season, and that appeared to be equally true for Bob Richey's career.

Richey had been an assistant coach for two seasons under Jeff Jackson, who had just resigned after posting his sixth losing season in seven years. So, as it had done for the better part of four decades, Furman once again was in search of a new head coach and a new beginning, which usually doesn't bode well for the assistant coaches left behind.

But Richey didn't see things the way many others did. While there was no arguing with the mounting losses, he was convinced the Furman program could easily move in a more positive direction. There was rising sophomore Stephen Croone, who Richey had recruited and who was the team's second leading scorer and assist leader as a freshman. There were other solid players on the roster, too, as well as some promising high school recruits like Kris Acox, Devin Sibley and Daniel Fowler.

In other words, Richey didn't see a team that had only won seven games the previous season. He saw a program that had a solid foundation and just needed a good push in the right direction.

That positive outlook must have affected the new head coach who was hired a few weeks later, because Niko Medved asked Richey to stay on the staff as his top assistant. And Richey's vision of the future was realized over the next four years when the Paladins got better every season, winning



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nine, 11, 19 and then 23 games in 2016-17, as they became the Southern Conference Regular Season Champions for the first time in 26 years.

So, when Medved left Furman after last season to take on another rebuilding project at Drake University, who other than Bob Richey deserved the chance to keep the momentum going? Richey was named the Paladins' new head coach in April, which was what the players made clear they wanted.

The importance of continuity wasn't lost on Furman Athletics Director Mike Buddie. "What kind of message does it send if you don't promote from within, when the staff has done everything you could have possibly asked?" he says. "They're winning basketball games, they're winning in the community, and they're winning in the classroom."

Looking back at the period after Jackson resigned and Medved took over, Richey says two things led to Furman's current success: Croone didn't transfer out of the program, and Acox, a 6-foot-6 recruit from Reykjavik, Iceland, honored his letter of intent.

"That's a pretty rare thing to happen during a coaching change, to keep two players like that," Richey says. "And let's be honest. You take Stephen Croone and Kris Acox out of the equation, and you and I aren't sitting here right now."

Yes, it usually comes down to the players, and the Paladins have definitely increased their talent level over the last four years. Croone, a guard, was SoCon Player of the Year



### THE TOP GUY

Bob Richey now leads a staff he has served on for seven years.

in 2015-16, and Sibley, a fellow guard, received the same honor last season as a junior. Acox was second team SoCon All-Conference, and guard Jordan Lyons was named to the All-Freshman team.

Four seniors—Sibley, Fowler, John Davis and Geoff Beans—return from last year's team along with several other players who saw significant playing time. Matt Rafferty, a 6-foot-8 junior who missed most of last season with a back injury after earning All-Freshman honors, is healthy again. All in all, seven of Furman's returning players have started games.

Richey says the Paladins have gotten deeper every season over the last four years, and this year's team will be the deepest yet. "For the first time since I've been here, we'll have 13 guys competing for

minutes," he says. "There will be some tough decisions about who to play, but that's a good problem for a coach to have."

Most coaches—and especially new coaches—tend to downplay their team's chances in any given season, but Richey can't help but be positive when he looks at his first team.

"We have four starters back, and we didn't lose a perimeter player," Richey says. "We have a big spot to fill with Acox having graduated, but I feel like we'll be able to do it. This team is close, they get along with each other, and they put in the hard work you need to be successful. We want to set the bar high, and the team's ultimate goal is to go to Asheville and win."

That, of course, would mean the Paladins win the Southern Conference tour-

namment and qualify for the NCAA tournament for the first time since 1980.

Richey says there is a difference between having a great team and having a great program. Great teams come and go, but great programs carry on every year no matter who's on the court.

"People thought we wouldn't be as good when Croone graduated, and we were actually better," he says. "And I'm sure they'll think the same thing when we lose four seniors next year. But great programs can replace key players because the culture and the daily work habits allow other players to step in and take over. When it's your time to play, you need to be ready. That's what we're working to accomplish here, to build a strong program." ●



# SPORTS BRIEFS

BY JOHN ROBERTS

## TOP OF THE FIELD

Perhaps the Southern Conference's fabled **Germann Cup**, which is awarded annually to the university with the top women's sports program, needs a new name.

This April, Furman captured its second straight Germann Cup. It's also the third in the last four years. In 2016-17, Furman won SoCon championship titles in cross country, women's tennis and women's golf, while securing regular season SoCon titles in women's tennis and softball.



Since the Germann Cup was established 31 years ago, Furman has won it 15 times.

So, how does the Furman Cup sound?

And the men didn't fare too poorly, finishing second in the comparable Commissioner's Cup.



## A PLACE ON THE DANCE FLOOR

**Greenville's Bon Secours Wellness Arena**, which welcomes more than 550,000 visitors a year, now has a purple front door.

In February, Furman announced that it would sponsor one of the main entrances to the 15,000-seat facility. University signage and flags now adorn a prominent arena entrance. And the concourse includes images of Furman's stunning campus.

The partnership offers Furman a number of other branding opportunities, including digital displays on the arena's scoreboard and circular ribbon board.



## LOOKING GOOD IN PURPLE

The **Furman men's basketball team** just missed qualifying for the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Tournament.

But the university still had a presence at the big dance. Furman and the Southern Conference served as co-hosts for the tournament's first and second rounds, which were held March 17-18 in Greenville's Bon Secours Wellness Arena and broadcast by CBS.

And the Diamond F was proudly emblazoned on the hard-court (please tell us you saw it).

Two of the regional participants—South Carolina and North Carolina—advanced to the Final Four with the Tar Heels winning it all.

NCAA officials, teams and fans must have enjoyed the experience. In April, the NCAA announced that the tournament would return in 2022.

Guess who gets to host again? ●



Notes from the Field



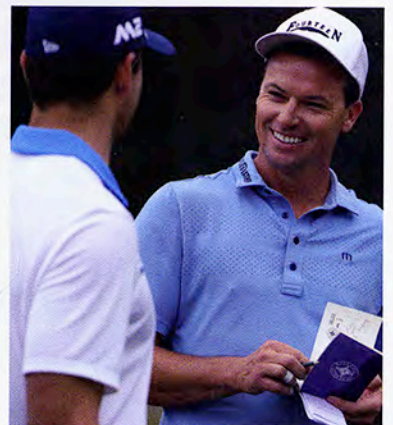
# BEST FACE FORWARD

FURMAN HOSTED THE  
NATIONALLY TELEVISED  
BMW CHARITY PRO-AM  
IN MAY

BY JOHN ROBERTS



## Notes from the Field



BMW Charity Pro-Am celebrities included Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers (left), Alfonso Ribeiro, who played Carlton Banks in the television show "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air" (above, second from right) and the camouflage-clad Larry the Cable Guy.

**O**n a soggy day in late May, German golfer Stephan Jaeger was declared the winner of the rain-shortened BMW Charity Pro-Am.

But another winner emerged: Furman University.

For the first time, the Furman Golf Club joined the storied tournament as one of three Greenville host sites. The others were the Thornblade Club and the Preserve at Verdae.

Tens of thousands turned out for May 18-21 golf tournament. And roughly 3 million viewed the event on the Golf

Channel, which broadcast the Pro-Am and aired commercials for The Furman Advantage during primetime.

It's hard to put an advertising value on the coverage and associated social media, but the event certainly helped the university expand its national reputation. And by all accounts, the university and the Furman Golf Club made a great first impression.

"All of the players said they loved the Furman course. It got a lot of rave reviews," said Becky Vuksta, Furman's director of auxiliary services, who played a big role in

organizing the tournament. "Everyone loved the way they were treated."

In accepting the BMW Charity Pro-Am trophy, Jaeger also gave the course kudos.

Since 2001, nearly 150 celebrities have participated in the Pro-Am, including actors Kurt Russell, Kevin Costner and Dennis Quaid. This year's headliners included Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers, comedian Larry the

Cable Guy, and former major league baseball players Paul O'Neill, Russ Ortiz and Chipper Jones.

The tournament is managed by the nonprofit organization South Carolina Charities and raised \$631,495 for 14 Upstate charities. Since its inception, the tournament has donated over \$12 million to more than 200 charities. Furman is scheduled to host again next year. ●

**BY ALL ACCOUNTS, THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FURMAN GOLF CLUB MADE A GREAT FIRST IMPRESSION.**