Athletic Excellence: A winning tradition advances, and spirit blooms anew

Furman University

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ATHLETIC EXCELLENCE

A winning tradition advances, and spirit blooms anew

The tongue-in-cheek cheer ("FU one time . . . ") that Furman fans have echoed across Paladin Stadium since President Gordon Blackwell began the tradition in the 1960s has come to symbolize pride in the thriving NCAA Division I teams and dozens of club and intramural sports. Because Furman Matters worked to maintain this tradition by expanding opportunities for scholar-athletes to earn degrees, while also generating school spirit and pride—both within the University and the greater community.

ATHLETIC PROGRAMS AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Programs and projects made possible through Because Furman Matters funds include: Alley Gym Volleyball Renovation; Baseball Complex; Blue Shoes/Furman Elite; Golf Course Renovation; Golf Practice Facility; Men's and Women's Lacrosse; Paladin Plaza; Pearce-Horton Football Complex; Scarpa Endowed Coaching Fund; Soccer Field House; Softball Press Box and Stadium Lights; Strength and Conditioning Renovation.

177
Southern Conference championships, the most by any current league member

$23 million
funds raised for athletics during the campaign
44,000 square feet in the new Pearce-Horton Football Complex, including 130 enclosed seats in club level and 50 seats in the President’s box.

15 Paladins who have signed professional football contracts since 2000.

11 total varsity wins over Clemson and South Carolina since 2001.

20 NCAA Division I Furman Paladin athletic teams.

94 percentage of Furman student-athletes achieving the NCAA’s graduation success rate 2008-2013.
A reflection of family ties and lifelong friendships

At least five times a month, the late Sonny Horton '52 was reminded that he made a good decision when he enrolled at Furman in the fall of 1948.

As often as possible, Horton met with former Furman football teammates, where they reminisced about college days. All are part of a network of close friends that Horton cherished for 65 years.

That affection for the school and its athletic department prompted Horton and his wife, Keeter (who played an active role in her husband's 1948 decision to attend Furman), to provide the major gift that made the new Paladin Stadium addition a reality.

Construction was completed on the Pearce-Horton Football Complex this winter thanks in part to a capstone gift from the Hortons. The 44,000-square-foot complex is the new home to the Furman football department, Heritage Hall, president's box, club seating and press box. The Hortons’ gift put the finishing touches on a fundraising project that has already made an impact on the football program.

Third-year coach Bruce Fowler ’81 led the team to the Southern Conference championship and a first-round victory in the Football Championship Series playoffs in 2013. He has enjoyed several banner recruiting years, and he thinks the excitement generated by the Pearce-Horton Football Complex was a big reason. “It gave recruits a good picture of the future,” Fowler says. “We’d take each recruit by the stadium, and seeing the construction seemed to make a huge difference.”

The Hortons have a history of making things happen—Sonny as a player and Keeter as a fan. That camaraderie is something that Horton knew he could easily have missed.

Horton had his choice of schools—but the greatest influence to attend Furman came from the Pearce household in the Greenwood community. Charlie Pearce ’24, a former Furman student and athlete, had earned Horton’s admiration. He also had a very attractive daughter, Keeter, who happened to be dating Horton at the time.

Keeter didn’t attend Furman but she admired the little school in downtown Greenville whose students proudly rang a bell when it claimed football victories. And she had been rooting for Furman even longer than she had been dating Horton.

Keeter’s connection to Furman couldn’t have been any stronger had she been a Furman student.

“We’ve both enjoyed Furman. For a long time. Furman has meant a lot to Sonny and a lot to me,” says Keeter Horton. “We’ve seen a lot of things we wouldn’t have seen otherwise, because of our connection to Furman.”

Charlie Pearce, who played on Furman football teams of 1921 and 1922, wasn’t a star player.

Horton was.

Horton helped make Furman competitive in ’49. He scored the winning touchdown in a win over South Carolina, and a 3–6 record included narrow losses at Florida (28–27) and Clemson (28–21).

Long after their college days, the Hortons had been fixtures at Furman games. And Horton’s name has become synonymous with the football tradition. Sonny Horton was elected to the Furman Athletic Hall of Fame in 1987, and received the Southern Conference Service Award in 2006, the Bell Tower Award in 2008, and the Order of the Paladin in 2006, as one of the charter members.

Horton’s leadership skills were no doubt apparent to Charlie Pearce back in the 1940s in Greenwood.

“He and Sonny were always best of friends,” says Keeter.

ADAPTED FROM ORIGINAL ARTICLE BY ABE HARDESTY, WWW.FURMANPALADINS.COM
The best kind of locker room talk

Wes Bray ’06 and Spear Sedgley

Wes Bray ’06 is a big guy. Really big. That’s not surprising for a former football star who, at one time, could bench press 450 pounds. But what is surprising about this larger-than-life athlete is how tender his voice gets when he talks about Spear Sedgley, the former Furman equipment manager, whose name now graces the new Furman Paladins football locker room in the Pearce-Horton Football Complex.

Were you and Spear close?

Spear was a second father to me. To everyone. And he treated everyone the same. With respect—allowing you to really be the young man you were. When you’re away from home the first time, well, it’s difficult. Spear made it better.

And that mattered.

It really mattered. He took care of us. He was always there, waiting to say just the right thing. Especially if things weren’t going well.

Sometimes things weren’t going well?

I remember coming into the locker room with a book in my hand, studying, because I was struggling. He just laughed and said, “You’re gonna be alright. Just keep moving forward.” So I did. And he was right.

You helped have the locker room named after him.

My wife, Claire ’07, and mother-in-law, are two very strong women. He laughs.

Very strong women. And they told me there was this naming opportunity for the locker room and it should be named after Spear. So I hopped on Facebook and basically contacted everyone I knew. And everybody was in. As my friend Trevor Kruger ’03 said, “Naming the locker room after Spear? No brainer.” We raised over $30K to do this. And it happened really fast because everyone loved Spear.

But Spear died before it happened.

Yes. Spear was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s disease, ALS, in 2009. The onset of it was so vicious that this man who would run three miles a day and then wear out the rowing machine was just decimated within a few months. And the first time I saw him after he was diagnosed he was using a cane. I gave him the biggest hug you can imagine. It was devastating. But he never complained. He always talked about PMA—positive mental attitude—it’s how he lived. And died.

Tell me about that time at the game.

That game was so special. You have to understand, Spear couldn’t walk anymore. Or speak. But you could see in his eyes he wanted to tell you something, but he couldn’t. So, at the end of this one particular game, the players asked if they could carry Spear off the field. The man who gave everything to this University.

And so they carried him off the field. And 16,000 people sat in that stadium and cried. I couldn’t look at anybody. I really can’t adequately describe how I felt that day. Or how I felt about Spear. There’s nobody else in our program’s history that meant more to that many players. Or to me.

#WhyFurmanMatters

Furman was everything to Spear. It just was. He ate it, drank it, bled it. For me, Furman was, is, my family. Then, now, forever. And a large part of that was Spear.

—WES BRAY ’06
Latham Baseball Complex

A home run for baseball

On May 11, 2013, the Furman baseball team celebrated the opening of a new complex focused on improving the team experience, including a $2 million clubhouse with spacious indoor batting cages, coaches’ offices and locker rooms. The new facility is located along the right field line just beyond the field of play. With a record number of wins in 2013 and two of its top recruiting classes ever, it has already become a symbol to the recruits and to the baseball community at large of Furman’s commitment to the program.

Plans are in place for significant upgrades to the grandstand and press box as donations become available.

Blue Shoes

Moving the decimal point

Chris Borch ’78 believes that with the right tools, anything is possible. It’s how he started his cross country career at Furman as a walk-on and ended it with a track scholarship, and it’s how he started a global company, Micro-Mechanics. He had the right tools at the right time. And he had the motivation to use them.

“Before I came to Furman, I had never been in an environment where there was such a high standard of performance, on and off the field, and so I knew, at some point, I would give back.”

That giving back came in the form of the Blue Shoes scholarship fund. Blue Shoes (named for the pair of shoes Borch received from his coach on the first day of practice his freshman year) provides scholarships for Furman’s cross country and track and field student-athletes. The initial gift of $250,000 to the endowment in 2005 has now been funded to $3.5 million. “My goal is always to move the decimal one place to the right. And to create sustainable programs, it’s imperative that it happens. We want this endowment to exist in perpetuity and if we move the decimal point just one more place, that would be $30 million long term. We can do that.”

Another initiative Borch is working on is a leadership
one place to the right: Chris Borch ’78

program that he’s devised to help Furman athletes succeed beyond the field and take the lessons they learn in school and apply them to real life.

“This year we’re implementing a program that can be applied across all athletics, all disciplines, every aspect of Furman life. It’s essentially six timeless lessons for life, and the first seminars for our runners rolled out in early February.”

Borch is also very involved with the team as an alumni supporter, talking on a regular basis with the coaches, runners and other fellow alumni to ensure that the athletes are getting the support they need.

Plus, twice a year, Borch, together with Furman, hosts the Blue Shoes 5K in the fall and a mirrored track and field event in the spring, which often features world-class runners and track and field athletes.

“We want to have the best cross country program in the country. I know from experience that you really gain invaluable life lessons when you pursue athletics diligently and purposefully. It is ideal. But it’s one worth pursuing. My life would have been entirely different without Furman athletics. It’s great to be in a position to give those opportunities to other men and women.”

A record year for cross country

The Furman men’s and women’s cross country teams swept the team titles at the Southern Conference Cross Country Championships in November of 2013—the first time both teams have claimed simultaneous wins. Furman head coach Robert Gary was honored as the 2013 SoCon Coach of the Year for both the men’s and women’s programs.

#WhyFurmanMatters

Furman helped me unleash the forces that led me to develop my full potential.

—CHRIS BORCH ’78
What about lacrosse?

It's been called the fastest sport on two feet, and for about a decade it has also been the fastest growing high school and intercollegiate sport in the nation. In 2012, buoyed by a $1.5 million start-up gift from Trustee David Trone, '77, Furman announced it would add Division I men's and women's lacrosse to its roster of intercollegiate sports, expanding the University's recruiting footprint for student-athletes seeking opportunities to play on the national stage. The women's team will begin play in Spring 2015. The men's team, under the direction of 35-year Division I coaching veteran and current head coach of the U.S. Men's National Senior Team Richie Meade, began play in Spring 2014 with a roster dominated by freshmen. We sat down to talk to Coach Meade about why the job was meant for him.

What was the deciding factor for Furman?
President Smolla made it clear how committed Furman was to athletics, and lacrosse specifically, and was willing to let me bring my leadership program to the team right away. Plus, the facilities are excellent. It's an intimate setting, and it doesn't hurt that it's in the '50s in January.

You have a significant winning record. What drives you to win?
Being a winning coach is relative to who's considering it. My only talent is determination. I really focus on my assistant coaches, developing them, and to insure that we've got the right approach to a problem.

And what's that approach?
A very disciplined one. We have a leadership program that's based on five principles: competence, character, commitment, courage, and compassion. Everything we do has to fit in one of these categories. You can't be technically tactical all day long, but it's the human part that makes you successful in the game.

Why are these five principles so important on the field?
Because it's what comes into play the first time you get punched in the face. It's the training that kicks in so you can take it and keep playing. It's how we're preparing for this first season.

How else are you preparing?
There will be many challenges this first season. We're attempting to do what very few teams have done, one year of recruiting and we're out there. Almost every recruit we've got was a personal recommendation, kids who wanted to come to Furman, and kids who know lacrosse. Athletes with a passion to practice. Because there's a ton of practice.

Why so much focus on practice?
Any team practices about five times more than they play. If you only focus on the games, you lose momentum in the practices. If the game is your focus you sacrifice the opportunity to help teammates achieve goals, to be enthusiastic every day, and to challenge each other as athletes. If you're only focused on the game or the win, that's a very narrow approach to the sport as a whole. And it won't work to make a winning team.

And you want a winning team.
I want Furman to have one of the best lacrosse programs in the country. And for the athletes we produce to have the kind of leadership ability that is reflected in everything they do. At school and in life.
Scarpa has a gift for winning. He also has a gift for player development, on and off the court.

And it's the players he can't stop talking about. Names. Stories. What they're doing now. Including the one who was on Wheel of Fortune (and won). The minister. The poverty studies specialist. "When you build a team, you build a family. I see that with my players," he says.

Scarpa retired in 2011, after 45 seasons during which he collected 853 victories—the most ever in NCAA Division I tennis. To honor him, the University established the Paul Scarpa Tennis Coach Endowed Fund. With lead gifts from tennis alumni Dave Ellison ’72, Ed Good ’67, and Dudley Reynolds ’75, the fund supports scholarships and other programmatic needs.

What's it like to be the winningest coach in America?

To be honest, I really just tried to do the best I could. The day before I broke the record, someone asked how I would feel if we won. I said, 'The same way I always feel when we win.' I wasn't even aware of it. And we won. So I kept coaching and we kept winning. It's satisfying to know you did your best.

You clearly have passion for the sport.

And for Furman.

I really love Furman. You don't build a house without a strong foundation and Furman has an unbelievable foundation of people who have gone before and done great things.

Why coaching?

As a kid, I loved athletics. I used to hit on a brick wall in front of my house and someone signed me up for a tennis tournament. I didn't like getting beat. So I practiced. Next thing I know, I ended up playing at Florida State. Then I went into the service and the athletic director asked if I would come back and coach the team. So I did.

When Dr. Gordon Blackwell became president at Furman after serving at Florida State, he asked if I would come to Greenville to coach tennis.

Back then you had to do more than one job. I was assistant basketball coach with Frank Selvy ’54 and Coach Lyles Alley ’33. I walked in the office one day and there was talk of starting a soccer program. So, I ended up coaching soccer for 14 years, too. And that's how it all started.

How's retirement?

I am enjoying spending more time with my family while doing the right thing for the right cause. I am transitioning as a special assistant. From admission to development to alumni—I am in a position where I can help. I am so proud of what so many alumni have done and their enthusiasm helps you in doing this job.

You have also been an innovator with the Scarpa Scoring System and your Tenex line tape.

Innovation comes with coaching. It goes hand in hand. When your team isn't doing well, you innovate.

And the tape?

We had clay courts at Furman and a painter was always working on the lines. He was elderly. I thought it was ridiculous that he had to do this and keep in mind I was out there painting with him. A friend allowed me to try new kinds of paints and coatings to see what might work. To implement the coating that worked, I used a mayo jar cap, a screwdriver, a clamp, and a piece of rusted pipe. The minute it went through the dryer, I knew this was it and it was perfect. As soon as people saw it, they thought it was great. We couldn't make it fast enough.

#WhyFurmanMatters

I believe in it. You always have to push to make your school the best you can make it. I don't want people to ask what Furman is. They should know.

—PAUL SCARPA

853 NCAA Division I career wins

$535,040 funds raised for the Paul Scarpa endowment

17 Southern Conference championships
A team for all seasons

Graham Seagraves '00 is someone who doesn't take no for an answer. His tenaciousness led "a blue collar team with a white collar talent" to the Elite 8 in the NCAA tournament in his senior season and it's the reason he and his wife Jarrell '00 made a significant lead commitment to build a soccer field house. Their gift was intended to be the catalyst for other soccer alumni and the growing legion of avid Furman soccer supporters to reach the $1.6 million mark needed to make the project a reality.

In March 2014, the dream was realized when Greenville entrepreneurs and community leaders Martha and Stewart Spinks made the capstone commitment that took the campaign to its goal. The Spinks Field House, set to break ground in Spring 2014, honors their contribution and their commitment to Furman. scholarships and Greenville.

"It is great to see my mom and dad step up to this opportunity," said Steve Spinx, longtime friend of Head Soccer Coach Doug Allison. "Soccer has been a big part of my life and helping Doug and Furman build a facility that will match the program's quality is very gratifying."

"Our family has enjoyed a friendship with Doug Allison since he came to Furman 20 years ago," said Stewart Spinks, founder and Chairman of the Board of the Spinx Company, Inc., who also has served as a member of Furman's Board of Trustees. "We've been the results of sustained excellence in the program, and more importantly on the lives of the young students who have found success in their athletic and academic lives at Furman. Our hope is to see the programs continue to flourish on the national stage for many years to come."

"Projects like this take commitment to a whole new level," said Seagraves. "And Jarrell and I are proud that so many have come forward to support the program. To have the final gift from Martha and Stewart Spinks, whose own story of perseverance and team effort mirrors the team, is all the more gratifying."

WhyFurmanMatters

Furman taught me about sacrifice, character, passion and selflessness. It made me the man I am.

—GRAHAM SEA Graves '00

34
number of men's soccer All-America selections over the past 20 years

19
men's soccer SoCon titles, the most by any school in the league

$1.6 million
raised for the new Soccer Field house project during the campaign
Furman rugby has the advantage in John Roberts

When John Roberts has something to say, he leans in closer to you, and, unconsciously, you find yourself leaning in with him. It’s powerful. And a little disconcerting. But that intensity is more than likely the way he was able to take a team of mostly neophyte rugby players in 1998 and lead them to a national championship in 2003. And 2004. And, then again, in 2005. The team was runner-up in 2008 and 2009.

At the time the team started, Roberts was playing rugby with a club in town, the Greenville Griffins, but he had small children to raise, knees that were achy, and he was ready for a new challenge. So he and teammate Marc Roberts ’99, a student at Furman, started a rugby team on campus.

In 2011, the team moved up to Division II from Division III and has been steadily climbing the ladder ever since. Furman ranked 18th in the nation in 2013. Going from a Division III team to Division II, while long term a good thing, has made for a couple of transitional years. But the transition hasn’t changed the way Roberts, also Furman’s communications director, leads the team.

“I focus on students making good decisions in both victory and defeat. Most importantly, we stress treating people and the game with respect, loving your teammates, and playing with passion and humility. It’s a tough game. There are a lot of young men who’ve grown up both physically and mentally on the field.”

And it’s that sentiment that led parents and players to name the new rugby stadium the John S. Roberts Rugby Field. “The players, parents, and alumni got together to determine what it would take to build the stadium. It would take $250k. So I started calling people. People I had told for years that I might come calling,” he smiles. “And when I finally did, 95 percent of the people I called contributed. Nearly $100k in that first attempt. Which, for alumni that graduated beginning in ’98, was a ton of money. It’s a testament to the sport. That it really meant something.”

And it was clear that Roberts meant something, too. Because unbeknownst to him, the parents and alumni got together and decided to name it after him. “When they told me that they were going to name the field after me, I was deeply moved. Humbled. Even now, I don’t feel like I deserve it.”

But he’s the only one that feels that way.

#WhyFurmanMatters

Furman matters to me because of the community and the relationships. As a coach, one of the greatest joys of my life is not just coaching the team, but keeping up with wives and children and seeing them every year at Homecoming.

Furman is about community, and that’s what makes a Furman education distinctive from other schools.

—JOHN ROBERTS