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Pearce-Horton Football Complex

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'll 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 2008, 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.

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