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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