Confident Medved takes command of men's basketball program

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Confident Medved takes command of men’s basketball program

NNOBODY HAS TO TELL Niko Medved the challenges he faces as Furman’s new men’s basketball coach. He was an assistant on Larry Davis’ staff nearly a decade ago, and he is familiar with the program’s results over the last 30 years — 10 winning seasons, one Southern Conference regular-season championship, zero trips to the NCAA tournament and five different head coaches.

So why is Medved so excited about taking on the challenge following Jeff Jackson’s resignation after seven seasons? It’s actually Medved’s familiarity with Furman that drives his optimism, because he can’t understand why those numbers shouldn’t be better.

“Furman is a special place, an amazing place,” says Medved, who spent the past six seasons as an assistant coach at Colorado State and whose wife, the former Erica Nesselroad, is a 2006 Furman graduate.

“The campus is beautiful, you can get a great education, and the surrounding community is wonderful. I was gone for seven years, and I come back, and everything is even better than before, both on campus and in downtown Greenville. What is there not to like about this place? There is a lot here to sell.”

That, of course, will be Medved’s basic challenge — to sell a product that has had trouble attracting buyers. The Furman basketball program has stirred little sustained excitement in the Greenville community since the early 1990s, when the team last won the regular-season league title, and poor student attendance at the games has allowed a whole generation of alumni to come and go without developing an allegiance to the program.

Medved, 39, understands all of this and is willing to do whatever it takes to get things moving in the proper direction. He wants to personally engage the Furman students and get them excited about attending games. He wants to be a highly accessible and recognizable figure in the community. And, most importantly, he wants to win games, which will solve any marketing challenge.

“It will take a lot of hard work,” Medved says. “There is no quick fix. We need talented players; we need a talented coaching staff. But we can win here. I know that. I wouldn’t have come back here if I didn’t think we could be successful.”

Medved first came to Furman in 1999 as a member of Larry Davis’ staff and stayed for seven years. It is worth pointing out that four of Furman’s 10 winning seasons during the past three decades came during that period, and the 2004-05 team posted the school’s first winning record in league play in 13 years.

When Davis resigned at the end of the 2005-06 season, Medved moved to the University of Minnesota program for a year, then joined Colorado State as an assistant coach. He was part of a staff that, after consecutive seasons of more than 20 losses, guided the Rams to four straight postseason appearances, including back-to-back trips to the NCAA tournament in 2012 and 2013.

“People ask me about the challenge at Furman, but I can tell you we had a bigger challenge at Colorado State,” Medved says. “There was a tremendous amount of hard work involved in turning that program around.”

He has received his share of credit for Colorado State’s success. When it was announced that Medved would be going to Furman, Matt Stephens, a sportswriter with The Coloradoan, wrote a column saying Rams fans should be grateful for Medved’s six years of service.

“I’d even argue he’s been the most instrumental piece for making CSU basketball what it is today,” Stephens wrote. “Tim Miles
[former CSU coach, now at Nebraska] was the face of CSU’s building project and Larry Eustachy is keeping it going, but behind the scenes has been Medved, bringing the talent to Fort Collins. He’s one of the most underrated recruiters in college basketball and has thrived from actually having integrity and treating folks around him with respect.”

What can Furman fans expect to see this fall when Medved’s first team takes the floor? A more upbeat tempo, for one thing. Medved was in charge of the Colorado State offense, which led the Mountain West Conference in scoring on its way to a school-record 26 wins in 2012-13 and a third-round appearance in the NCAA tournament, where the Rams lost to eventual champion Louisville.

He’s bringing that offensive philosophy with him to Furman.

“People can expect to see a lot of ball movement, a lot of player movement,” he says. “We’ll be aggressive and we’ll be an attacking team. When we get a good shot, we’ll take it.”

Medved says he could count on one hand the number of set plays the Rams ran in 2012-13. “I don’t think people come out to watch a system,” he says. “They come to see you play with passion and energy. And that’s the way we’ll play. We’ll be a fun team to watch.”

— VINCE MOORE

The author is director of news and media relations at Furman and has been the official scorer for men’s basketball for 30 years. Photo by Jeremy Fleming.

The Corbin-Furman connection

FRANK SELVY ’54 (above, left) is the most storied name in Furman basketball history. Jerry Smith ’63 is not far behind.

But other than their accomplishments on the hardwood, their memberships in the Furman Athletic Hall of Fame and their retired jerseys that hang in the rafters of Timmons Arena, what do they have in common? At least two more things: Both are from Corbin, Ky. And both are featured in a new book, The Boys from Corbin: America’s Greatest Little Sports Town (Acclaim Press), which recounts the stories of a host of athletic stars who came from the little town in the Kentucky hills. “It’s not just a sports book,” author Gary West has said. “It’s about a community and how families banded together.”

The Corbin-Furman connection plays a prominent role in the book. The story of the Selvy clan starts with Frank, the only player to score 100 points in an NCAA Division I basketball game and, in West’s view, “the man who put Corbin on the map.” The university’s all-time leading scorer with an average of 32.5 points per game, Selvy went on to play in the National Basketball Association for nine years, then returned to Furman to succeed Lyles Alley as basketball coach. Several of his brothers would follow him to Furman, either as players (David ’65 and Curly ’71) or as a coach (Marvin).

Smith arrived at Furman almost a decade after Selvy and made his mark as a three-time all-Southern Conference player who averaged 23.3 points per game for his career. He is the school’s fifth all-time leading scorer and was drafted by the Detroit Pistons of the NBA.

Smith and the Selvy boys are featured in photographs on the book’s back cover. West, a freelance writer and former newspaper reporter, lives in Bowling Green, Ky., and has written seven books about various aspects of life in his home state.

The book was released April 13 with a well-attended signing and other events in Corbin. Smith and much of the Selvy family were on hand for the unveiling.